

**Y Pwyllgor Plant a Phobl Ifanc
Children and Young People Committee**

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Dear Gwenda

Thank you for your letter of 26 March 2012 regarding *Missing Voices* - the report of the Children's Commissioner's review of independent professional advocacy services.

Given the extent of previous scrutiny into advocacy provision and the number of recommendations made by the Children and Young People during the Third Assembly, we are concerned at the wide range of issues raised by the Children's Commissioner in his report and these concerns are set out in the attached annex.

The Committee has reviewed the 29 recommendations outlined in the *Missing Voices* report, 11 of which are specifically to be taken forward by the Welsh Government. We note that in respect of current advocacy provision in Wales, the Commissioner states that 'this situation cannot be allowed to continue and must be addressed as a matter of urgency'.

In light of the scrutiny undertaken by the previous Children and Young People Committee into the provision of advocacy services, the current Committee looks forward to receiving a copy of your response to the Commissioner. The Committee will review and then consider its position on this important issue.

Yours sincerely



**Christine Chapman AM
Committee Chair**

The Children and Young People Committee of the third Assembly published three reports into the provision of advocacy services for children and young people in Wales and made 30 recommendations in total in respect of advocacy provision for children and young people in Wales between 2008 and 2011. The first report, in 2008, was published following an inquiry into proposals made by the Welsh Government on a *New Service Model for Delivering Advocacy Services for Children and Young People*.¹ In May 2009, following scrutiny of progress made in implementing the Committee recommendations, a short report was published containing a further five recommendations to the Welsh Government.² In September 2010, a further report was published on the provision of advocacy services³.

Model of commissioning advocacy provision

Of central importance was the Committee's recommendation that a centrally funded advocacy unit be established. In its legacy report, the Committee stated it:

‘was disappointed that the Welsh Government did not agree to establish a centrally funded national advocacy unit opting instead to take forward a reconfiguration of local services so that specialist integrated advocacy services will in future be planned and commissioned by the local authority Children and Young People Partnerships.’

Within this context, we are concerned that the Children's Commissioner's research identifies a range of concerns arising from the model of commissioning and delivery of advocacy provision which was chosen by the Welsh Government. Specifically the Commissioner identifies that there is ‘inconsistent provision of advocacy across Wales’ and ‘a lack of clarity and consistency about the way in which independent advocacy services are commissioned in Wales’.

Role of the National Independent Advocacy Board and the Advocacy Development and Performance Unit

¹ The Welsh Government agreed with 9 of the 12 recommendations made in the report and agreed ‘in part’ or ‘in principle’ with the remaining three.

² Of the five recommendations made in the report (one of which was in two parts), four were accepted by the Welsh Government and two were accepted in part.

³ The report contained a further 13 recommendations relating to the provision of advocacy services. 10 were accepted by the Welsh Government and 3 were accepted in principle.

In 2010, the Committee's follow up report on advocacy included a recommendation that:

[...] the Welsh Government should provide greater clarity over the future functions, expectations and workplan of the National Independent Advocacy Board, and its Advocacy Development and Performance Unit.

In his report, the Commissioner states that 'the National Independent Advocacy Board (established by the Welsh Government in 2009) has not been able to achieve its objectives or to provide a national strategic lead on advocacy in Wales'. He goes on to say that the Welsh Government Advocacy and Development Unit has 'not fulfilled its intended remit' and has 'not provided a strategic lead on advocacy in Wales'. He also states that 'there is no strong strategic leadership by Welsh Government to make sure that eligible children and young people get equal access to independent professional advocacy in Wales'.

Progress in delivering universal, independent advocacy provision

The Committee is aware that progress has been made in respect of recommendations made by the previous Committee in respect of advocacy. We welcome the provision of a 24 hour, 7 day a week, free helpline ('Meic') which has been developed further to a previous Committee recommendation to establish a national phone and text advocacy line. However, the previous Committee noted that the helpline could only signpost children and young people to the advocacy services that currently exist and therefore 'could not currently guarantee parity of service across Wales'.

In the introduction to the 2010 report the Committee Chair at the time, Helen Mary Jones stated:

More than two years on from our original inquiry, I was disappointed to hear evidence during this review that suggested that a universal, independent advocacy service for children and young people is still not a reality in Wales.

The Committee is concerned that the Commissioners report raises further doubts as to whether sufficient progress is being made to provide advocacy support to vulnerable children in Wales.
