

Written Response by the Welsh Government to the report of the Children, Young People and Education Committee entitled Report of the inquiry into statutory advocacy provision

MARCH 2017

On the 2 February 2017 the Children, Young People and Education Committee published a report of their inquiry into statutory advocacy provision. The report followed a short inquiry undertaken between October-November 2016, the focus of which was the implementation of the National Approach to Statutory Advocacy and the impact of Part 10 of the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014. The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children provided written evidence to inform the inquiry and attended a briefing with the Committee on the 14 December. He informed them that he had agreed the Implementation Plan to progress the National Approach at a regional level, to be in place by June 2017, and also agreed to commit up to £550k for the National Approach.

The Report contained 8 recommendations for Welsh Government.

The Welsh Government's response to the Report's recommendations is set out below:

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that Welsh Government monitor and ensure that all local authorities have actively signed up to the 'National Approach' by January 2017.

Response: Accept

In a letter to Cabinet Secretary, dated 13 December 2016, the WLGA confirmed national support had been gained from the 22 leaders for the approach to date and for the future development of the service. They also restated their commitment to the Implementation Plan.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that Welsh Government Monitor and ensure that local authorities fully implement the 'National Approach' by June 2017, in line with the timescales in the Implementation Plan.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government is in regular dialogue with the Implementation Manager to receive updates on progress and is assured that the National Approach will be in place by June 2017.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that Welsh Government update the Code of Practice on Advocacy that accompanies the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014 to reflect the 'National Approach'.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government intends to update the Code of Practice on Advocacy to take account of the National Approach. A technical group will be established this spring to advise the Welsh Government on the changes to the Code which can be laid following the consultation on the National Independent Advocacy Standards and Outcomes Framework.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that Welsh Government monitors annually local authority expenditure on statutory advocacy services and that it is funded in line with the population needs assessment analysis.

Response: Reject

The Welsh Government has agreed to provide up to £550k to the regions through a regional grant for years 2017/18 and 2018/19. The Grant will include terms and conditions to enable the Welsh Government to monitor expenditure for the first two years of implementation. Thereafter it will be placed into the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and monitoring will be through the Annual Reports of the Regional Partnership Boards.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that Welsh Government consults on a draft and publishes a final National Independent Advocacy Standards and Outcomes Framework which includes an approach to the 'active offer' by June 2017.

Response: Accept

The approach includes the National Independent Advocacy Standards and Outcomes Framework (NSOF), the next step for Welsh Government is to consult with stakeholders on the outcome statement contained in the NSOF and develop the final draft of the Framework. We intend to consult by the end of March 2017.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that Welsh Government commissions an independent review of progress at the end of the first year of implementation of the 'National Approach'.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government agrees with this in principle and will work with ADSS Cymru on the scope and timing of a review.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that Welsh Government reviews how the MEIC Cymru helpline aligns with the National Approach and ensures that there is effective read-across between statutory advocacy services and universal advocacy provision both to maximise the efficient use of resources and the range of provision for young people as part of the active offer.

Response: Accept

The national helpline MEIC has an important role in providing an open advocacy service to all children. The National Approach relates to the commissioning and provision of statutory advocacy to eligible children with needs for care and support, which is not something that the helpline provides. However, going forward the Welsh Government will consider the wider provision of advocacy services, including Meic, and how they align.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that Welsh Government provides a detailed update to the Committee on progress in implementing the 'National Approach' in June 2017.

Response: Accept in principle

The National Approach Implementation Plan has been developed by the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS Cymru) who will report progress to Welsh Government through the Senior Leadership Group who in turn will update the Committee on progress.

Financial Implications –

The implementation of the National Approach has been costed at between £1 and £1.1 million. This includes the 'active offer' allocation of up to £550k being provided by Welsh Government.

Carl Sargeant AM, Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children