



To:
Councillor Mark Child
Cabinet Member for Health & Wellbeing

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Date 10 January 2018
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Summary: This is a letter from the Child & Family Services Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing following the meeting of the Panel on 18 December 2017. It covers the update on Advocacy.

Dear Cllr Child

The Panel met on 18 December and received an update on Advocacy.

We would like to thank Chris Francis for attending to go through the report and answer our questions. We appreciate his engagement and input.

We are writing to you to reflect on what we learnt from the discussion, share the views of the Panel, and, where necessary, raise any issues or recommendations for your consideration and response. The main issues discussed are summarised below:

Advocacy Update

We heard that the National Standards and Outcomes Framework from Welsh Government is still in draft form even though local authorities had to have the Approach in place by June 2017.

In relation to Independent Reviewing Officers, we heard that they play an important role to ensure advocacy is taken up by children and that they also advocate on behalf of children at review meetings. We also heard that BAYS Plus provides advocacy for children aged 16 plus.

We were informed that the National Approach is in addition to what is already being done in Swansea, it commissions independent advocacy. Also any child being considered by a case conference will now have explained to them that they can have an advocate to represent them.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

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We heard that each Council has had responsibility for providing independent advocacy since 2002 but that it is probable that this service was underused as there was not enough promotional activity. The new National Approach should therefore lead to an increase in children wanting advocacy.

The Panel agrees with the aims and principles of the National Approach but it has to be done in a child friendly way. The Approach has to consider what is already being done for the child locally. For example, Swansea schools are rights protecting and Social Services use Signs of Safety which already provide opportunities for children to give their views.

We were informed that the National Approach is regional through Western Bay and that an independent organisation has been contracted to undertake the advocacy and they will employ staff directly.

The Panel was concerned about calculations used by Welsh Government for the range and level tool which calculates the level of need for advocacy and the funding required. There have been no serious issues in Swansea in recent years so a 130% increase in budget seems far too high, especially when the Swansea advocacy system is working reasonably well. We support the Department's plan to make representations to Welsh Government to amend the tool, and particularly the cost of providing the advocacy service, in light of Swansea advocacy service working reasonably well. In a situation where the Department's budget is being reduced, this seems to be adding another unnecessary department cost.

We heard that in the past there has been a misunderstanding about what the role of an advocate is, however this no longer appears to be the case so should not put off referrals.

We felt that the language of the new Approach is challenging for young people. It needs to be in a language children can understand. Even the word 'advocate' is difficult to understand.

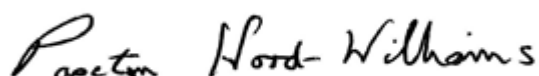
Letters

We are pleased with the comprehensive responses we have received from you, particularly to the convener's letter on pre decision of the Family Support Services Commissioning Review focussing on Children with Additional Needs and Disabilities before it went to Cabinet and the detailed information you provided on scoring.

Your Response

We hope you find this letter useful and informative. We would welcome your views and comments on any of the issues raised and please note that in this instance, a formal response is required. Could we have your reply by 31 January 2018.

Yours sincerely



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