

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **CABINET**

DATE: **15TH JULY 2014**

REPORT BY: **CHIEF OFFICER – SOCIAL SERVICES**

SUBJECT: **REGIONAL COMMISSIONING OF CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE’S ADVOCACY SERVICE**

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 To seek approval to proceed to tender 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.

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 Flintshire Social Services Department currently commission an independent professional advocacy service for children and young people, in collaboration with Wrexham and Denbighshire. This contract comes to an end in March 2015.

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

2.03 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.

2.04 This report recommends that Flintshire Social Services Department commissions advocacy for children and young people known to Social Services in collaboration with the other five North Wales local authorities.

2.05 Commissioning of the advocacy service on a regional basis in partnership with the six 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.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.01 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.
- 3.02 The Welsh Government guidance lists the vulnerable groups of children and young people which have a statutory right to independent advocacy.
- 3.03 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)
- 3.04 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.
- 3.05 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
- 3.06 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.
- 3.07 The North Wales Family Support Group was presented with a number of commissioning options to address these. The options were based on monitoring data, population data, mapping, consultation results and evidence gathered during the first stage of the project. The North

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)

Wales Family Support Group chose the following commissioning option, as a staged approach with a plan to bring 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).

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

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.01 Cabinet is asked to support entering a regional collaboration, on the basis of efficiencies that can be achieved including reduced management costs and shared personnel and resources. In addition collaboration between 6 counties and BCUHB would create a consistent regional service.

- 4.02 On the basis of the business case Flintshire County Council will be assured that high quality advocacy services will continue to be delivered and extended to a broader population of children and young people in North Wales.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.01 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

- 5.02 The service was accessed by 58 NYAS children and young people from Flintshire 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.

5.03 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.

5.04 The Heads of Children's Services agreed to a appropriate budget 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

5.05 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.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

6.01 None arising from this report

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

7.01 None arising from this report

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.01 The eligibility for this service accepts that a child or young person who is Looked After or a Child in Need is eligible to receive the service. There are no other discriminating features and children and young people will not be excluded for any reason based on ethnicity, culture, religion, gender or sexual orientation. A provision of the service specification will be to deliver the service through the medium of Welsh where the child or young person's first language/language of choice is Welsh.

8.02 An equality impact assessment has been undertaken and can be found at:-

<http://intranet/doc.asp?cat=10373&doc=32197>

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.01 None arising directly from this report

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

10.1 There is an expectation that we would seek the views of children and young people and key partners agencies.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

11.01 North Wales Head of Children's Services

11.02 The Clinical Programme Group Lead BCUHB

11.03 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.

11.04 Officers from Social Services, Health, Education and the voluntary sector are proactively involved in the regional task group.

11.05 Welsh Government Advocacy Unit and the chair of the Ministerial Expert Group on Advocacy.

12.00 APPENDICES

12.01 None

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None

Contact Officer: Neil Ayling
Telephone: 01352 702500
Email: neil.ayling@flintshire.gov.uk