



**Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
The National Assembly for Wales**

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

**Dydd Mawrth, 13 Gorffennaf 2010
Tuesday, 13 July 2010**

Cynnwys
Contents

- 3 Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions
- 4 Dilyn yr Ymchwiliad i Wasanaethau Eiriolaeth ar gyfer Plant a Phobl Ifanc yng
Nghymru
Follow-up on Inquiry Into Advocacy Services for Children and Young People
- 24 Cynnig Trefniadol
Procedural Motion

Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynndi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal,
cynhwysir cyfieithiad Saesneg o gyfraniadau yn y Gymraeg.

These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee.
In addition, an English translation of Welsh speeches is included.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Eleanor Burnham	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Angela Burns	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Helen Mary Jones	Plaid Cymru (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) The Party of Wales (Committee Chair)
Joyce Watson	Llafur Labour

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Phil Diamond	Cadeirydd Cymdeithas Swyddogion Cymorth Partneriaethau Plant a Phobl Ifanc Chairman of the National Association of Partnership Support Officers, Association of Children and Young People's Partnership Support Officers
Carol Floris	Rheolwr Cyngor a Chefnogaeth, Voices from Care Advice and Support Manager, Voices from Care
Helen Gregson-Holmes	Rheolwr, Tîm Partneriaeth Plant a Phobl Ifanc Conwy, Cymdeithas Swyddogion Cymorth Partneriaethau Plant a Phobl Ifanc Manager, Conwy Children and Young People's Partnership Team, Association of Children and Young People's Partnership Support Officers

Swyddogion Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yn bresennol
National Assembly for Wales officials in attendance

Sarah Bartlett	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Sarah Hatherley	Gwasanaeth Ymchwil yr Aelodau Members' Research Service
Abigail Phillips	Clerc Clerk
Helen Roberts	Cynghorydd Cyfreithiol Legal Adviser

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.17 a.m.
The meeting began at 9.17 a.m.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Helen Mary Jones** Bore da, **Helen Mary Jones:** Good morning, gyfeillion. Croesawaf yr Aelodau, y tystion everyone. I welcome Members, witnesses a'r cyhoedd i'r cyfarfod hwn o Bwyllgor and the public to this meeting of the Children and Young People Committee of the National Cymru. Atgoffaf bawb fod croeso ichi Assembly for Wales. I remind everyone that ddefnyddio'r Gymraeg neu'r Saesneg, a bod you are welcome to use Welsh or English, and that headsets are available to hear the clustffonau ar gael naill ai i glywed y simultaneous translation or to adjust the cyfieithiad ar y pryd neu i addasu lefel y sain.

Fe'ch atgoffaf hefyd y dylid diffodd ffonau symudol, 'mwyar duon', galwyr ac unrhyw ddyfais electronig arall. Nid yw'n ddigon da diffodd y sain, gan eu bod yn amharu ar yr offer cyfieithu a'r offer sain. Nid ydym yn disgwyl ymarfer tân, ac, felly, os bydd larwm tân yn canu, bydd hynny'n golygu bod problem, a bydd y tywyswyr yn dangos y ffordd allan.

I also remind you to switch off mobile phones, BlackBerrys, pagers and any other electronic device. It is not sufficient to put them in silent mode as they will still affect the translation and audio equipment. We are not expecting a fire drill, so if the fire alarm sounds, that will mean that there is a problem, and the ushers will show us the way out.

[2] Hoffwn wahodd yr Aelodau i ddatgan unrhyw fuddiannau o dan Reol Sefydlog Rhif 31. Gwelaf nad oes. Os felly, gofynnaf i'r Aelodau a fyddant yn fodlon imi beidio â gofyn am ddatganiadau yn y dyfodol. Yr wyf yn gofyn ym mhob cyfarfod, ond nid oes byth buddiant i'w ddatgan. Os nad wyf yn gofyn, golyga hynny mai chi sydd â'r cyfrifoldeb o ddweud pan fydd gennych fuddiant sy'n ymwneud ag agenda benodol. Mae hynny'n un peth ffurfiol yr oeddwn yn credu y gallem gael gwared arno. A yw'r Aelodau'n fodlon ar hynny? Gwelaf eich bod.

I remind Members to make any declarations of interest under Standing Order No. 31. I see that there are none. In that case, I would ask Members whether they would be happy for me not to ask for declarations of interest at every meeting in future. I ask in every meeting, but there is never an interest to declare. If I do not ask, that means that the onus is on you to declare an interest relating to a particular agenda. That is one formal thing that I thought we could get rid of. Are Members content to do that? I see that you are.

[3] Yr ydym wedi cael ymddiheuriadau gan Sandy Mewies; nid oes neb yn dirprwyo. Nid yw hynny'n broblem, oherwydd mae pawb arall yma.

We have received apologies from Sandy Mewies; there is no substitute. That is not a problem, because everyone else is here.

[4] Croesawaf hefyd yr Arglwydd Douglas Hoyle, a fydd yn oriel y cyhoedd yn y man. Mae'n ymweld â Chaerdydd ar gais y Llywydd.

I also welcome Lord Douglas Hoyle, who will be in the public gallery shortly. He is visiting Cardiff at the request of the Presiding Officer.

9.19 a.m.

Dilyn yr Ymchwiliad i Wasanaethau Eiriolaeth ar gyfer Plant a Phobl Ifanc yng Nghymru

Follow-up on Inquiry Into Advocacy Services for Children and Young People

[5] **Helen Mary Jones:** Hoffwn groesawu Carol Floris o Voices from Care. Yr ydym wedi cael ymddiheuriadau ar y funud olaf gan Debbie Jones, y prif weithredwr. Mae ganddi broblemau teuluol, gan fod un o'r plant yn sâl. Felly, bydd Carol yn gorfod gwneud y gwaith i gyd.

Helen Mary Jones: I welcome Carol Floris from Voices from Care. We have received last-minute apologies from Debbie Jones, the chief executive. She has family problems, as one of the children is ill. Therefore, Carol will have to do all the work.

[6] I know that we can rely on Carol to speak out strongly for Voices from Care's perspective. Thank you for the written paper that you have submitted. We shall move straight into questions, Carol, if that is okay with you.

[7] **Ms Floris:** Yes, that is fine.

9.20 a.m.

[8] **Helen Mary Jones:** The first area that we want to look at is the progress in delivering the Government's advocacy model. The committee has some concerns about the pace of change in commissioning advocacy services and the implementation of those services. What is your view on this, and are you confident as an organisation that the Welsh Government's vision for advocacy services in Wales is realistic and achievable?

[9] **Ms Floris:** We have seen a very mixed picture of delivery. Some areas are focusing on the new model and taking great steps forward; in other areas, there has not been the same will to put advocacy high up on the agenda. In our experience, the concept of advocacy has remained evident in the sphere of looked-after children and children in need, but in some areas, the concept has not really filtered through beyond that. We welcome the new model, but we are not sure whether it is completely realistic. Many people see advocacy as quite a simple thing: a young person rings up, you answer the call, you ring someone else on their behalf and the problem is solved. In our experience, that is definitely not the case, although we do work with a vulnerable group that experiences greater complications. However, I do think that there are likely to be complications in relation to any child or young person who rings up in need of advocacy. The process is much more complicated than some believe.

[10] If we are saying that that process will potentially be available to all children and young people in Wales—not that they will all need it—that has huge implications for capacity and so on. For instance, will the service be available in a specific area, and will it be similar to the service offered to other young people? It may be the case that the service is provided by an organisation that, for some reason, has a different concept of advocacy to other organisations. For example, Voices from Care believes in independent, strong, uncompromising advocacy. That is one theory, but other places may not understand the concept in that way. To give an example, everyone at Voices from Care has been in care. I know from experience that the care system, as it is now, does not have to be the way that it is. In the future, it will change. However, you could have an advocate who comes into the system, with no experience of it, who might think, 'This is the care system and we can't challenge it'. They might think, for example, that if a social worker tells someone that they have to move, or have to leave care at the age of 18, that that is the case. However, Voices from Care knows from experience that if you challenge those things, you can sometimes achieve change. That is how change happens. So, you could end up with services operating in quite a different way, which is a concern for us as an organisation.

[11] **Helen Mary Jones:** The second area that I would like to touch on is the independence of advocacy. In your written evidence, you suggest that the independence of advocacy providers could be compromised through regional commissioning through the children and young people's partnerships. What action is needed to ensure that the new commissioning arrangements would deliver a truly independent service?

[12] **Ms Floris:** The stance of Voices from Care is still that national commissioning is the only way to get complete independence and to get consistency across the board, so that people know what advocacy is available and how it is delivered. We can then say that 'Independence is independence', rather than saying that 'Independence is independence, but—'. That is our stance; anything else is not really going to be independent.

[13] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you. That is very clear. I now call on Joyce.

[14] **Joyce Watson:** Good morning. I have read your paper and thank you for it. I am going to look at the need for skilled advocates. You say that you would like to see a greater focus on self-advocacy. What might be the benefits for children and young people in

concentrating more effort on developing self-advocacy and peer advocacy?

[15] **Ms Floris:** In some ways, advocacy can be quite a disempowering model. If you have a problem, you ring someone who will do something for you and your problem is solved. That can be needed in certain situations and in a crisis. If young people are going to get on in life, they will need an element of self-advocacy. We are always self-advocating for ourselves. We would like to see that brought more into the mix so that people learn the concept of self-advocacy and children and young people are taught that concept. Although they might be doing that by saying, ‘You can do that yourself’, or whatever, people do not really understand the concept. If adults understood it, they could make sure that children and young people understand it. Therefore, young people could be doing as much advocacy for themselves, or their peers, as possible. Then, they could use services when they come to a bit of a standstill. That will all be preparation for future life. What we see with young people who have been involved with our organisation for a while is that, in the beginning, they rely on us to do some of the advocacy for them, and sometimes it takes a while, but after a few years they are advocating for themselves and advising other young people. That is part of the mix, is it not? It is not about constant reliance; it is about learning skills and becoming empowered yourself.

[16] **Joyce Watson:** I understand fully where you are going with this and I think that it is a great concept. It is the case, is it not, that young people who have ended up in care have often had many rights removed? Are you saying that their right to use their own voices to speak for themselves is another right that might be removed? Are you fearful that advocacy, however well-meant, could somehow disempower rather than help?

[17] **Ms Floris:** Yes, if self-advocacy is not there in the equation. Although, as I say, self-advocacy is kind of implicit in how we relate to children and young people, it is about making it more explicit by giving some resources to it and raising awareness raising of it.

[18] **Helen Mary Jones:** I will ask a supplementary question before I bring in Eleanor. The kind of self-advocacy model that you are advocating seems to imply the need for a longer term relationship, particularly for a vulnerable young person, like a young person in care, between the child and their advocate. It has been put to us that some local authorities are developing a practice of commissioning advocacy services almost on a one-off basis—if there is a crisis with a particular child, that child is offered an advocate. It has also been put to us that that is a very poor way of providing advocacy services because it means that there cannot be that long-term relationship. Does Voices from Care have a view about that sort of purchasing and commissioning of services as it is done now?

[19] **Ms Floris:** Yes. From our perspective, that would certainly not be a good enough model for the provision of advocacy. By looking at the mix, we see some situations where advocacy is withdrawn too quickly so that although the situation has been resolved, sometimes young people have time to think about how it has been resolved and they then have further questions. We all know that, sometimes, over time, things do not turn out as they were promised and where one resolution was promised, half of it may have been provided, but the other half may not. That may not be immediately obvious.

9.30 a.m.

[20] They need an advocate to be checking up and empowering them by saying, ‘Come back to me if this doesn’t happen’, so that they can go back. That brings in that kind of self-advocacy element as well.

[21] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you. That is helpful.

[22] **Eleanor Burnham:** Diolch yn fawr i **Eleanor Burnham:** Thank you very much.

chi. Mae'ch papur yn ddiddorol ac mae llawer ohonom yn gwybod o'n profiad ein hunain fod y mater yr ydym yn ymdrin ag ef yn bwysig iawn i bobl fregus. Yr ydych yn mynegi pryderon ynglŷn â'r effaith ariannol a gweithredol y gallai archwilio a rheoleiddio eu cael ar ddarparwyr gwasanaethau eiriolaeth llai. A oes gennych farn am yr hyn y dylid ei wneud o ran trefniadau archwilio a rheoleiddio yn gyffredinol?

Your paper is interesting and many of us know from our own experiences that the issue that we are dealing with is a very important one for vulnerable people. You raise concerns about the potential financial and operational impact of inspection and regulation on smaller advocacy providers. Do you have a view on what should be done in relation to inspection and regulation arrangements in general?

[23] **Ms Floris:** I think that advocates should be skilled. Some people come into advocacy from a professional route, but many people come into it from a personal route or a community route. We would not want to see a system that bars people from coming into the profession and the advocacy sector, by insisting that they qualify and register with a care council. We would not like to see them not being able to come into the profession to use their experience of a particular kind of system, in relation to which they may feel a passion to advocate. We would like to see something that people can go into and for there to be progression. There is also, for us, a slight anomaly about the word 'skilled'. Would having a qualification mean that you were more skilled than someone, for example, who has been brought up in care and worked in an organisation like Voices from Care for a number of years? There are always things to learn, but it is the idea of there being people who are skilled and unskilled that is quite difficult for us to agree with. Also, that would be true for many other user groups where the advocacy movement started. That is a bit of a discrepancy for us.

[24] **Eleanor Burnham:** So, you are fearful that people with empathy and the urge to help others in this very important way could be put off by the over-bureaucracy or over-officialdom in many respects.

[25] **Ms Floris:** Yes. I think that you could end up with systemised advocacy and with those people who feel that passion and have that experience going down another route, setting up their own organisations and so on. If we are going to promote advocacy and deliver an advocacy model that best serves vulnerable people, as we now have a chance to do, we need to incorporate that kind of experience into it from the start and not exclude certain people.

[26] **Eleanor Burnham:** The Children's Commissioner for Wales suggested that the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales should be responsible for inspection regulation, working closely with Estyn and Health Inspectorate Wales. What do you think about that?

[27] **Ms Floris:** There is a need for inspection, but whether it should be on the model of inspections as they are is questionable. Also, my understanding is that you might not get some of the things that they are looking for in inspections from advocacy. You are talking about people's choice to be involved in advocacy and most inspection systems are not involved in those situations of services being provided. So, there would need to be some debate about the type of inspection and what inspectors are looking for.

[28] **Eleanor Burnham:** That brings me on nicely to my other question. You describe some of the positive outcomes of advocacy in your written evidence. Do you have any suggestions for how these softer and more long-term outcomes can be captured and reported, particularly bearing in mind that you say that you are fearful of becoming over-regulated, or over-this, that and the other?

[29] **Ms Floris:** My understanding is that a lot of work has been done on measuring softer outcomes. Much of it comes back to the longer-term relationship; you would get some of those things, but it is about getting—

[30] **Eleanor Burnham:** The intangibles.

[31] **Ms Floris:** Yes. It is about maybe getting those things later on. So, that would be about the advocacy relationship maybe being a bit longer, so that some of those things can be measured. However, for us, advocacy is a part of a longer-term model, and is a continuum ranging from advocacy, self-advocacy, or peer advocacy, so that people would have to be looking over the long term.

[32] **Eleanor Burnham:** What kinds of outcomes would you measure? The outcome that everyone would want is the contentment or the satisfaction of the vulnerable person.

[33] **Ms Floris:** Yes. In the advocacy relationship, you would perhaps be explaining to the person what they thought would be their goal at the beginning. You may be negotiating that, and saying, 'Look, you are not going to get that, but you may get this'. So, hopefully, you end up with a person who is fairly satisfied, but who maybe did not get fully what they originally intended.

[34] **Angela Burns:** Good morning, Carol. Thank you for your paper, which I read with interest. I want to return to one of the points that you made at the beginning. You said that Voices from Care was disappointed that the Government favoured the regional commissioning model, rather than our recommendation of having an independent advocacy service. You go on to say that it is still too early, however, to see how that model is working. While I agree with you, I would be happy, if you so wished, to share with you some of the instances that have come from my casework of people who are still finding it difficult to get that truly independent advocate. They are still using the social worker, who is there to do the social work bit, as the advocate, which is what we were trying hard to move completely away from as a committee. I believe that we had complete cross-party support on that, did we not, Chair?

[35] I want to ask you in particular about vulnerable groups of children and young people. The children's commissioner and Children in Wales have raised concerns about the levels of advocacy for those particular groups of children and young people. How does that chime with your experience, if at all? Do you believe that they are able to access advocacy services successfully?

[36] **Ms Floris:** No, they are not all able to do so at the moment. It is a mixed picture, depending on the local support for advocacy. Some areas have provided advocacy for a range of vulnerable groups; in other areas, it has not changed from looked-after children and perhaps children in need. So, it is a mixed picture.

[37] **Angela Burns:** Do you believe that those groups of children need specific targeting, and, if so, why do you believe that? If we are targeting advocacy at young people, would that not be enough? Do we need to look specifically, say, at the children of asylum seekers, or children who have special educational needs?

9.40 a.m.

[38] **Ms Floris:** On targeting advocacy, people generally use phrases such as 'problems with education' or 'problems in the family'. Such phrases do not really chime with the experience of some vulnerable groups. They may not have problems with their families, but their families may be threatened with removal. So, from the very beginning with the advertising of advocacy, you need to use particular phrases for particular groups. They may have general issues, but they may also want advocacy on particular issues. Unless it is pointed out to them that that is available, it will pass them by as being a service that is not of concern

to them. That is why that sort of promotion that is specific to them is needed. There are also particular access issues. For looked-after children, there is a great deal of worry about technology, such as mobile phones and internet access. Without those things, they may not be able to contact an advocacy provider or the advocacy and advice line when they can speak freely. So, there are issues like that that need to be looked at.

[39] **Angela Burns:** I know that we have been through this before, but, for this particular session, could you again expand on how important it is for children and young people to have the support of an advocate of their choice? That would be a good point to get on the table. Do you really believe that an independent advocate for a child would make that much difference to their lives?

[40] **Ms Floris:** Yes, completely. Some of the examples that we have dealt with lately to do with moving placements demonstrate that. Young people may have found somewhere they feel settled—they are at school, they have friends and a chance of having a few years of an ordinary life where they can make some progress. If they are threatened with a move, they have to start all over again. The thing with children and young people is that, if that takes a year, they have lost a year of their childhood that they cannot make up. So, it is absolutely essential.

[41] **Angela Burns:** At the moment, we are obviously suffering enormous financial pressures as a nation. Do you think that this will be an easy target for cuts for commissioning bodies, local authorities or whoever? Do you see that services will be cut?

[42] **Ms Floris:** Yes. As I said in the paper, no-one really knows the demand for advocacy. I think that there is a tendency to try to get a smaller service for as little as you can and to push advocacy to be a quick resolution of issues. That is a worry.

[43] **Angela Burns:** So, you think that it is issues-driven rather than it being about relationship building.

[44] **Ms Floris:** Yes. The economic situation will have an impact on the situations that advocates are involved in, so that will possibly make things more complicated and more long term.

[45] **Joyce Watson:** Moving on to the issue of universal access to advocacy services—or advocacy services for all, to put it in plain English, I suppose—you highlight the importance of ensuring that children and young people have equitable access to effective advocacy services. That is critical because, as you say in your paper, if you have advocacy services, they must be the same for everyone, because an advocate is someone speaking up for your rights. If that person is not empowered to do that job properly, they will not empower the people they are speaking for. So, what role do you think the independent advocacy board should have in monitoring that?

[46] **Ms Floris:** It should be ensuring that advocacy is available across the board and trying to ensure that consistency, but it will still be difficult to do that with the regional commissioning model, to ensure that consistency. They also need to understand what is happening in each area, what issues young people are facing, and whether advocacy is leading to change in that area. So, it is about providing that kind of overview, which will be difficult to provide with the regional commissioning. Furthermore, you are not only faced with different issues in each area, but you also have different advocacy provision. So, it then comes down to how you monitor those two variables, which will be very difficult.

[47] **Helen Mary Jones:** One important element in measuring those variables and assessing and monitoring whether the services work is the voices of children and young

people who have used the services. Are you confident that the views of the children and young people who use the services will be used in setting the quality and ensuring independence and in informing the commissioning, or does more work need to be done to ensure that that happens?

[48] **Ms Floris:** I think that a lot more work needs to be done. To be involved, children and young people will need quite a lot of information because, having just used an advocacy provider, they may not understand where a certain service comes from or even the independence issues. They may wonder what the word means and whether these people are really independent. So, a lot of work needs to be done on children and young people's understanding, looking, for example, at what questions will be asked of them, because not all will want to be heavily involved. They will just want to give a quick overview of the service that they received. So, people need to ask some well-thought-out questions and not just, 'Were you happy?'. So, a lot of work needs to be done on that.

[49] We need to think about the whole question of independence. I know that children and young people have said that they want independence, but most of the children and young people whom I meet are not really sure what that means. So, we have to do the work and inform them of what that means. I know, from my work with Voices from Care, that people can see when you are not connected with the service, but with their side of it. We have had that experience, and so we know that. That is a real pull and builds trust. It also gives credibility to you saying, 'Look, you will not get what you want this way, but try it like this', and it shows that you are informing and communicating with the young person.

[50] **Helen Mary Jones:** As you know, the Government aspires to have a national advocacy service that is available to all children and young people. Earlier, in your responses to Angela, we touched on the difficult financial times that we face. This might seem like a slightly provocative question, but given that money will be tight, is the Government right to hang on to a model of advocacy services for all children, or would it be better to target the resources that we have got on a really good service for the most vulnerable children and young people? Most children, fortunately, have advocates such as parents, older brothers and sisters, grandparents, a good teacher or someone in their community, but looked-after children, asylum-seeking children, and some of the vulnerable groups that we talked about earlier do not have that natural advocacy available to them and that is why they need an advocate. We would all agree in principle that an advocacy service that is available to all children is the ideal, but if you had to prioritise, would it be your view that a Rolls-Royce service for vulnerable children and young people might be more important than a Ford Fiesta service for everyone? I think that Joyce wants to add something to that before you reply.

9.50 a.m.

[51] **Joyce Watson:** I do, because fear strikes me when you talk about the identified vulnerable. There are probably more unidentified vulnerable than there are identified vulnerable. When I say that fear strikes me, it seriously strikes me that if we were to allocate, as you suggested, Chair, all our resources to the identified vulnerable, who might be the minority, we would miss the large majority.

[52] **Helen Mary Jones:** For Members' information, I asked the question because we may be up against that kind of thinking and we need to be ready for that. I do not know whether you have a view, Carol, on whether we should target this, or whether, as Joyce said, we should ensure that we cast our net broadly enough so that we pick up the young people who, with help, might be able to be kept out of the care system, for example.

[53] **Ms Floris:** In our paper, we said that there needs to be more thought about the first layer, the natural advocates, and making that more explicit. As with self-advocacy, there

needs to be a plan to make that more explicit, because we have not seen anything from the model that is starting on that work. I know that that is later down the road, but we need to make a start now, because we have many adults coming in who have had advocacy, but then have got stuck. Those people need to be able to access a Rolls-Royce model, but you have to keep some people out there by making it explicit that we are all advocates for children and young people and explaining how we can do that, giving people information about systems. However, you also need that Rolls-Royce model for vulnerable children and young people who need to come across, whether they come across themselves or whether an adult is phoning on their behalf. It is a bit like the care system, in that it is all or nothing. When you are not in care, there is not much for you, and then, when you are in care, everyone wants to know. However, these are the same young people and they will be turned off; they will not want to access advocacy if you were not there for them when they really needed you.

[54] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is a useful point, and it is useful to get that on the record. Thank you very much for your evidence today, Carol, and for the paper, which was very informative, as always. I was very struck by the point about the long-term relationship and building the capacity to self-advocate. Is there anything else that you would like to put on the record about where we are with advocacy services for children in Wales? Are there any major issues that you want us to highlight to the Government in our report from this inquiry?

[55] **Ms Floris:** One issue that Voices from Care very much picked up on is the advocacy and advice line and the thinking that advocacy should be provided from birth to 25, which means that there needs to be much better working with adult advocacy providers. We need to stop thinking that children and young people are those aged under 18, or we need to marry up the thinking, because if we think that it should go up to the age of 25, and yet advocacy services and other services do not think the same way, we are worried that young people will be led up the wrong path. They will be told that something is available, but when they ring, no-one will know about the advocacy services that are available to them.

[56] In addition, on the gaps in advocacy services, we need to be careful about the young people who are caught up in that process of identifying the gaps and that we do not let them down, and if they are trying to access advocacy but there is nothing available in their area, there needs to be a kind of contingency plan about how we will help that young person. It is all very well identifying the gap, but that will not help them.

[57] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is great, Carol.

[58] Diolch yn fawr. Bydd egwyl yn awr Thank you very much. We will take a short
o ryw bum munud i ailosod linc y break of about five minutes to set up the link
gynhadledd fideo. for the video-conference.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 9.55 a.m. a 9.59 a.m.
The meeting adjourned between 9.55 a.m. and 9.59 a.m.*

[59] **Helen Mary Jones:** Ar gyfer rhan **Helen Mary Jones:** For this part of this item,
hon yr eitem hon, gallaf hysbysu'r Aelodau I can inform the Members that, although we
er nad oeddem yn gallu defnyddio'r Gymraeg I previously could not use Welsh with people
o'r blaen gyda phobl mewn mannau eraill, who were at other locations, we can now do
mae modd gwneud hynny yn awr, am fod y so, as the feed now allows for it.
cyflenwad yn ei chaniatáu.

[60] Can I just check that you can hear the translation, Helen?

[61] **Ms Gregson-Holmes:** Yes, I can hear the translation.

[62] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is fine. Members may ask questions in Welsh, therefore. There was a time when we could not use Welsh for video-conferences, so I am just checking that it is working. Thank you very much.

[63] Croesawaf Phil Diamond a Helen I welcome Phil Diamond and Helen Gregson-Gregson-Holmes. Diolch yn fawr am ymuno Holmes. Thank you for joining us.
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[64] Thank you also for the written evidence from the Association of Children and Young People's Partnership Support Officers. It is very useful. As we have had the written evidence, we shall go straight into questions. I will begin with a question to both of you.

[65] The committee has some concerns about the pace of change in commissioning advocacy services and its implementation. Would you agree that, while there have been discussions, and a lot of work has been done behind the scenes, there has been relatively little progress on the ground in delivering real improvements for children and young people across the board? Some of the evidence that we have received is that things are still pretty patchy. Who wants to start?

[66] **Mr Diamond:** Ladies first. *[Laughter.]*

[67] **Ms Gregson-Holmes:** That is a difficult question, because I am not speaking for all of Wales; I can only speak for Conwy. I think that we are making progress—

[68] **Helen Mary Jones:** Hello?

[69] **Ms Gregson-Holmes:** I lost you for a while.

[70] **Helen Mary Jones:** Can you give us some examples of what has been going on in Conwy, if you do not feel that you can speak from a national perspective, after which we will bring Phil in?

[71] **Ms Gregson-Holmes:** In Conwy, we have looked at advocacy and we have tightened up the contracts for our advocacy service. We have had a little bit of a delay, because we are waiting for the new guidance to be issued, as we did not want to start work and then find that the guidance sends us another way. At the moment, regionally, we are looking at having a clear definition of advocacy, we are looking at the differences in the services that we provide, and we are looking at best practice to see how we can pull all that together and possibly share—sorry, are you still hearing me?

[72] **Helen Mary Jones:** Yes. You are fine.

[73] **Ms Gregson-Holmes:** Okay. We are looking at how we can share good practice, at what we can take from each other, and at how we can move that on. When you are looking at regional commissioning, it takes a while, because we have six sets of advocacy, all of which are slightly different, and to pull them together and agree on a way forward will take us some time. With the guidance as the basis, we feel that we are moving quite quickly.

[74] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you, that is helpful.

[75] **Mr Diamond:** Good morning. If I can, I will speak from Blaenau Gwent's perspective and then just move out a bit into some of the work that we have been doing at the Gwent level. Within Blaenau Gwent, we have moved a considerable distance; we have moved from specialist advocacy provision within social services to universal provision. That work was carried out with our local advocacy provider and, in fairness, it identified spare capacity.

At the moment, we offer a universal service, and have done for the past 18 months to two years.

[76] We have seen an increase in the number of referrals, which is encouraging, and that is what you would expect from opening it up to a universal service. During quarter 3 of last year, I think that we had more referrals than we did in the whole of the first year in the service. We have piloted a team-around-the-child model in Blaenau Gwent, and part of that process uses the common assessment framework. Quite recently, we have undertaken to include a question in every CAF assessment undertaken within the authority—I think that over 130 young people have had a CAF assessment—of whether there is a need for advocate provision. So, we are moving that advocacy provision, and not just to cover children and young people who are known to social services, but also to tier 1 and tier 2 children who might just be on the cusp of social services territory. That has been seen as a big positive by the advocacy provider in Blaenau Gwent, and we hope to mainstream the service.

[77] The advocacy provider has looked at the guide for modelling the delivery of advocacy services, and feels confident that we may be two thirds or three quarters of the way there. There is nothing within the guidance which makes us think that this is going to be difficult. Admittedly, we need to progress a few areas, but the guidance, as it stands, is favourable and causes us no major concerns.

[78] That is Blaenau Gwent's perspective, and we have the benefit of a very passionate advocacy provider in the area. I am not saying that any other area is not passionate, but we have a person who is willing to challenge us and is not afraid to do so. We will probably get on to independence of advocacy provision a bit later, but this person, who is based within social services and the children and young people's partnership, is one of our most vocal challengers. That has been helpful, and that is key to push the service onwards.

[79] I was going to mention the joint commissioning arrangements at a Gwent level, but is that moving too far? Will it be the subject of a later question?

[80] **Helen Mary Jones:** No, that is fine.

[81] **Mr Diamond:** In light of the guidance being issued, we have recently undertaken to look at joint commissioning across the five authorities of Gwent. The five children and young people's partnership co-ordinators got together with the five assistant directors of social services. We sought agreement on the opportunity to explore joint commissioning across the board, and I am pleased to say that everyone agreed. The first exercise that we undertook was service mapping of what advocacy looks like in each of the authorities. Those service maps have been returned recently, and we are doing an analysis tomorrow with the five assistant directors of social services and the co-ordinators.

[82] It is when you start to look at a regional concept that you start to see some of the difficulties. There is huge variation in advocacy provision across the five authorities. In Gwent as a whole, I could not say that advocacy has moved as far forward as it has in Blaenau Gwent. That is not me trying to blow the trumpet of Blaenau Gwent—it is just an area that we have worked on and, through the personality of the provider more than anything, we have a very good relationship and we have been able to move the service on.

[83] **Helen Mary Jones:** You will not be surprised to hear me express the concern that we cannot depend on passionate individuals. That is what good advocacy has depended on in the past, but those individuals retire or move on, and we are left with a problem. Eleanor, you wanted to ask a supplementary question.

[84] **Eleanor Burnham:** Yes; you are very kind, Chair. This is a question to both of you. I

know that there is a team-around-the-child approach in Wrexham, for instance, so does that give you in Conwy a beacon to work around, or does it make it more difficult? You talk about universal provision. Does that mean that you could be nipping problems in the bud? If cases are not formally referred to social services, does your provision of advocacy have a preventative focus, providing a forum for youngsters so that they do not become involved in a more formal sense with social services?

[85] **Ms Gregson-Holmes:** That is why we are doing the mapping with the advocates and the training that they receive. Hopefully, we will solve the workforce development issues around that so as to deliver more training and share training across the different disciplines, so that children are able to talk to people whom they know and trust. That will hopefully help them to resolve any issues before they get to the stage where they feel that they need independent professional advocates. Does that answer the question?

[86] **Helen Mary Jones:** Yes—Eleanor is nodding.

[87] **Mr Diamond:** As I mentioned, the advocate is heavily involved with the team around the child common assessment framework. She sits on the CAF panels, and so on. With the inclusion of the question on every common assessment framework, I believe that we are moving towards that preventative service by working at tier 2 of that common assessment framework. A crude term that has been used is that it could be seen as a ‘dropdown’ from social services. Whether it is crude or not, it is working in a preventative nature and hopefully it is trying to prevent problems escalating for young people. So, the earlier we get advocates involved in the process, the better it is for us.

10.10 a.m.

[88] By moving to universal services, we are not just relying on children and young people to become known to social services. We have had referrals come in from education—education welfare officers and so on—and it has been difficult taking it to universal services within schools, so to speak. It is also worth noting that this is optional for children and young people; it involves them wanting an advocate. Even with going into local schools and plastering the walls with our providers’ names and showing that we are there to help, we are still not seeing the huge numbers of referrals that we would expect, considering some of the issues that we know exist within the authority.

[89] **Helen Mary Jones:** You talk about referrals; are children and young people able to directly refer themselves to your advocacy service, as well as through—

[90] **Mr Diamond:** Yes. We put the helpline number and the advocacy provider’s number on posters in schools, through our family information service and on our websites. We have been in to schools to give presentations on raising awareness of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and so on. On the back of that we have been talking about rights and linking in to the advocacy agenda .

[91] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is very helpful; thank you.

[92] **Angela Burns:** Good morning to you both. Listening to your evidence, it was clear that both your areas have started to move quite heavily in the direction of travel that the Minister indicated on the statutory provision of advocacy services. I wanted to talk about the statutory guidance relating to this and to the commissioning of advocacy services. However, you are here to represent the Association of Children and Young People’s Partnership Support Officers. When you look across Wales—you have already slightly indicated this—do you think that this direction of travel has started in general? The guidance will not be published until the summer, so I am interested to know what people have been doing in the last year and

a half, while we have been talking about it, and how much preparation work has been undertaken.

[93] **Helen Mary Jones:** Phil, do you want to have first shot at answering that?

[94] **Mr Diamond:** I am happy to take that question first. I will talk from a Gwent perspective. As I mentioned, the five authorities have got together to look at the guidance, which was the catalyst to bring us all together, in that we needed to look at it. Within the joint commissioning area, we are investigating this—we are meeting tomorrow, as I said. I think that people are taking note of the guidance and are moving forward. There has been, as Helen mentioned, a slight delay, because we have been waiting for the guidance as well. However, I do not think that people have been resting on their laurels—they have been moving—but in some areas, advocacy providers have been moving quicker than in others, and some have been waiting for the guidance and so on. However, we have certainly explored and had some robust conversations around joint commissioning and the economies of scales around that agenda. We have had robust discussions on one advocacy provider sitting across the five local authorities, what that service would look like and how we could share best practice. That is from a Gwent perspective.

[95] From an all-Wales perspective, we met as the all-Wales association yesterday, and one of the agenda items was this evidence-giving today. There was general consensus that people are taking note of the guide for modelling advocacy services. However, there is a sense of waiting until the guidance is issued at a later date.

[96] **Angela Burns:** Thank you; that is interesting. Have either of you, or the association as a whole, had much input into the statutory guidance that is due to come out? Have you been negotiating with the Welsh Assembly Government on this matter?

[97] **Helen Mary Jones:** Helen, did you hear that?

[98] **Ms Gregson-Holmes:** There was a little delay.

[99] **Helen Mary Jones:** Have you had any direct input, either directly through the Government, or through the advocacy development and performance unit?

[100] **Ms Gregson-Holmes:** Not personally, but we have an advocacy sub-group that has been in contact with Elin, and it has commented on the guidance.

[101] **Mr Diamond:** We have not had any personal input either, but the item has been on the agenda at the previous all-Wales association meeting, so we have kept abreast of local developments and had an opportunity to comment and feed into the process.

[102] **Eleanor Burnham:** A yw'n bosibl imi ofyn fy nghwestiwn yn Gymraeg i Helen? **Eleanor Burnham:** Is it possible for me to ask Helen my question in Welsh?
Helen?

[103] **Helen Mary Jones:** Can you hear the translation, Helen? I see that you can.

[104] **Eleanor Burnham:** Yr ydych wedi crybwyll y mater o weithio'n rhanbarthol. Pa drafodaethau yr ydych wedi'u cael ar y mater hwn? Yr ydych hefyd wedi trafod eich bod yn disgwyl am arweiniad gan y Llywodraeth, felly pa fath o gynlluniau sydd gennych, yn y partneriaethau hyn, i leihau unrhyw oedi wrth **Eleanor Burnham:** You have mentioned the issue of working on a regional basis. What discussions have you had on this matter? You have also mentioned that you are waiting for guidance from the Government, so what plans do you have, in these partnerships, to minimise delay when commissioning these

gomisiynu'r gwasanaethau?

services?

[105] **Ms Gregson-Holmes:** Last July, we, as a north-Wales group, had discussions on advocacy and on putting a project together to explore the way forward. Recently, we have met with all of our lead directors and the north-Wales co-ordinators to look at the programme initiation document and take it forward. So far, we have gathered the data on the length of contracts across Wales, and we are trying to analyse the different types of advocacy that are provided; some are providing universal advocacy and others independent advocacy. We are also going to start working with Meic to see how we can pull it into the process, and see how we can use it best in north Wales; we are looking at Meic having link names of formal advocates, so that it has someone to contact on behalf of the children and young people who get in touch with the service. We have met with the lead directors, and have agreed on the PID. We are also trying to agree on a regional definition of advocacy, which is going to be based on Conwy's definition; this is included in the packs, and we are tidying up that definition at the moment to ensure that everybody is happy with it. We are looking at the list of guidance for formal advocates, and adding to it the people or professions that need to be there, so that we can move on to look at their training needs.

[106] **Eleanor Burnham:** Hoffwn gael **Eleanor Burnham:** I would like a short eglurhad byr o ran beth yn union yw explanation of what exactly the Meic service gwasanaeth Meic, a sut y mae'n gweithio. is and how it operates.

[107] **Helen Mary Jones:** Could one of you give Eleanor a definition, or shall I?

[108] **Eleanor Burnham:** A lot of people are listening; they hear the word 'Meic'—

[109] **Helen Mary Jones:** Meic is the national advocacy helpline that the Government has established, and several concerns have been raised with us as to how it links in with local advocacy services, if at all. Thank you for your response, Helen; it describes where you are very well, and suggests to me that, once the statutory guidance is out, you will be close to being ready to run in north Wales. You have already talked about processes, Phil; do you want to add anything?

[110] **Mr Diamond:** First, at a local level, there is joint commissioning of advocacy service provision by social services and via use of the Cymorth grant. The five local authorities explored joint commissioning at a regional level; I admit that it is only when one looks at the variety of services offered across the five areas that it starts to become difficult to look at joint commissioning within the region, because the services that are offered are so different. On economies of scale, I do not think that any huge savings will be made from joint commissioning across a large region.

10.20 a.m.

[111] By its nature, advocacy provision is about working with children and young people; it is operational. The potential for saving on management costs would be small. Within the Cymorth structure, we work on no more than 5 per cent to 10 per cent management costs. So, if we were to bring advocacy provision together across the region, I do not think that we would be saving vast amounts of money. However, if we were to look at joint commissioning across the board, we might have an increased service. You may have a specialist service in, say, Caerphilly that is used to advocating on behalf of children who have disabilities; we do not have that in Blaenau Gwent, for example, and so that could be shared. However, that could possibly be shared without any formal joint commissioning arrangements. So, it has become apparent that joint commissioning across more than two areas is difficult, but if we are talking about five areas, we are looking at something very complex.

[112] We have a few options to consider when we meet tomorrow. One option is joint commissioning in a smaller sub-region. Two of the local authorities that border Blaenau Gwent use the same advocacy provider, so it might be quite easy for us to look at joint commissioning across three areas as opposed to five. However, there is still variation in the types of service available. One area may offer the bare minimum—literally advocacy only for those children known to social services—while another area may offer a full universal service. What we do not want to see is an equalising of services that may result in taking services away from one area that has worked in this field and giving services to another area. It is not so much that that area may not be ready for those services, but that we do not want to take away services from an area where they are working well. We must be mindful of that.

[113] **Ms Gregson-Holmes:** In the meantime, while we look at the six counties, we, Ynys Môn and Gwynedd are looking at regional commissioning of independent advocacy from March onwards. We are working hard on that at the moment. So, we hope that we will learn lessons from that too. We will probably contract for only a couple of years until we are ready to do regional commissioning. One of the benefits that we feel that we will get from regional commissioning is that children could move areas and still use the same telephone number and still know what the service is that they will get.

[114] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you. I have to say, Phil, that I am a bit concerned to hear how difficult it is, although I can understand that. Perhaps I have misunderstood, but, as a committee, it is our understanding that the Government's statutory guidance will require regional commissioning in order to build in that level of distance—although I do not think that, as a committee, we have accepted that that is the same as independence—between the service provider, say in social services or education, which is the local authority, and the delivery of advocacy. Are you expecting that requirement for regional commissioning to be in the statutory guidance?

[115] **Mr Diamond:** Yes. I think that there has been talk with regard to the model for advocacy of children and young people's partnerships commissioning the services, rather than social services and education. I think that having that distance will be a good step. As I mentioned, in our area, we have someone who is able to challenge these things. However, it is worth mentioning that children and young people ask the question themselves: 'Who pays for you? Social Services? They are the people I'm complaining about'. So, we are in total agreement that a move to a more independent body, such as the children and young people's partnerships, would be a positive step. It is also worth mentioning that the children and young people's partnerships rely heavily on the lead member, which is the local authority, so you often find your way back to local authorities in using some of the resources around writing service level agreements, and using people in the local authority such as joint commissioning managers and so on. So, we cannot say that it would be a totally independent service because, in this day and age with budgets being cut, we are pooling not just resources but expertise. We will have people working across different areas, and that is the case in Blaenau Gwent. Although the children and young people's partnerships commission advocacy, with Cymorth grant money, we do rely on the joint commissioning manager within social services to help out as well.

[116] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you; that is helpful.

[117] **Eleanor Burnham:** I ba raddau y mae plant a phobl ifanc yn rhan o'r broses o gomisiynu gwasanaeth, a sut y bydd y partneriaethau'n mynd i'r afael â'r her o gynnwys plant a phobl ifanc ar sail ranbarthol a sicrhau cynrychiolaeth briodol, o ystyried yr hyn yr ydych newydd ei ddweud, Phil, a'r **Eleanor Burnham:** To what extent are children and young people part of the commissioning process, and how will the partnerships address the challenges of involving children and young people on a regional basis and ensuring appropriate representation, considering what you have

hyn a ddywedodd Helen yn gynharach? just said, Phil, and what Helen said earlier?

[118] **Ms Gregson-Holmes:** We are at the next stage and we are ready to start working on a tender, and that is when we will start to undertake consultation with young people. We will ensure that children and young people who use the advocacy service currently are involved, as well as those who may use it in the future, through participation, group work and by focusing on children and young people who have been in the service and looking at compliments and complaints. Then, after we have pulled together a tender, we will obviously make that child-friendly and talk to them about it to see whether it fulfils their needs. We have already done some work with children and young people around advocacy, and they are quite clearly telling us at the moment that what the guideline defines as formal advocacy are the people who they feel most comfortable talking to about issues.

[119] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you; that is helpful.

[120] **Mr Diamond:** We have a looked-after children forum in Blaenau Gwent, and like most areas, a youth forum, but we have a kind of sub-group with this looked-after children forum, which is co-ordinated by our advocacy provider. So, the direct voices of looked-after children come straight into our process. The advocacy provider sits on our core aim 5 group, which is about participation and voices heard, and as you are probably all aware, she sits on the CYPP as well. So, the voice that the children and young people have through that looked-after children forum can be fed into the partnership as a whole. It is noted in point 7.2 of the evidence that a young person advisory group made up of young people from Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly and Torfaen has been set up. One of the group's tasks will be to assist with interviews and commissioning and that is currently in place. The sub-region consists of the three authorities across which the advocacy provider works, and that work has started, but I feel that you can never hear too much of children's voices and we must not just rely on those mechanisms. We must be proactive in looking at other avenues, especially through our monitoring and evaluation, and in using children and young people's views.

[121] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you, that is very helpful.

[122] **Joyce Watson:** Before I move on to my formal question, Chair, I want to probe a little on what I have heard and read. I have two questions. One is to Phil about his young people's forum and whether the forum targets what could be perceived as the most vulnerable group, namely those living with domestic abuse, caring responsibilities and any social needs that they might have. The other question is on Gwynedd's approach to providing advocacy for young children. I have looked at your evidence and point 3 talks about a tiered system that has been decided somewhere—and, from your evidence, I do not know where it was decided—for children needing advocacy, as you see it. Then in point 3.6, you have a whole plethora of people providing different services for different needs. It all seems a bit of jumble to me and I do not know how you have arrived at it, so I would like some explanation of it. My key question to you is: how have you arrived at that list from point 3.2, considering that you are going to move this forward?

[123] **Helen Mary Jones:** I will ask Phil to respond first because that should be fairly straightforward and that will give Helen a chance to respond. Is that okay, Helen?

10.30 a.m.

[124] **Ms Gregson-Holmes:** I did not hear the question.

[125] **Helen Mary Jones:** It was about how you have arrived at the tiers of service that are set out, not in your area, but in Gwynedd; is that right, Joyce?

[126] **Joyce Watson:** Yes.

[127] **Ms Gregson-Holmes:** I cannot hear.

[128] **Helen Mary Jones:** Could you give the paragraph numbers again, Joyce?

[129] **Joyce Watson:** I referred to paragraphs 3, 3.2 and 3.6. Chair, perhaps we can write to Ms Gregson-Holmes if she is unable to answer now, because I am unhappy with the list that I mentioned.

[130] **Helen Mary Jones:** Helen, we will write directly to Gwynedd Council, because we are asking for a level of detail that you may not be able to offer. Phil, are you able to answer on the point that Joyce raised with you?

[131] **Mr Diamond:** I am sure that there have been widespread comments that the youth fora and school councils are seen as having high achievers sitting on them. There are high achievers sitting on our youth forum, but there are also vulnerable young people. We conducted an exercise last week—a development and needs assessment for our children and young people’s plan—and had young carers, looked-after children and Polish young people in the group. We represent vulnerable young people, but, again, I would say that we cannot do too much of that. I am proactive in encouraging more vulnerable young people to join, and I am currently working with a young lady with a disability who we would like to include in the group. We have not cracked the situation yet, but neither is the forum filled with A* pupils. We have a history of involving vulnerable young people, and our youth mayor, who will be taking up the role in November, comes from a vulnerable background.

[132] **Helen Mary Jones:** I remind Members and witnesses that we will be trying to fit 11 questions into the next 20 minutes. I guess that we will not manage to get all 11 questions in, but I ask Members to be as concise as possible in their questioning, and for witnesses to do the same in their responses. I know that it is not easy, because it is such a big and complex field and there is much to be said. We will move on to your next set of formal questions, Joyce.

[133] **Joyce Watson:** To what extent, if any, has the association been involved in the development of the Meic service? How confident are you that the service has all of the information that it needs on local advocacy provision?

[134] **Mr Diamond:** This answer may sound like a bit of a cop-out, but the advocacy provider in Blaenau Gwent has just been seconded to Meic for two-and-a-half days, so we can say that we have been heavily involved at a local level. However, as I mentioned, information on the Meic service has been brought to associations so that they can be kept abreast of its development and can feed into it. However, even though the Meic service is out there—and I think that it is a very good service—we need to work on the process of coming together and working in partnership.

[135] **Ms Gregson-Holmes:** I agree with what Phil said; I do not think that the situation is any different in north Wales.

[136] **Joyce Watson:** What arrangements have been put in place to ensure that there is an effective two-way flow of information in relation to advocacy service provision and the demand for advocacy services?

[137] **Helen Mary Jones:** That question refers to Meic.

[138] **Mr Diamond:** We are still working on that, and the issue was raised yesterday at the

association meeting. We are looking to invite representatives from the Meic service to our next meeting to look at how working arrangements can be improved. We are all raising awareness of the Meic service in our areas, and we have been kept abreast of the latest information and developments. However, the next step is to formalise those arrangements and the link between Meic and the local provision, to create the boundaries where one service stops and another picks up the baton.

[139] **Ms Gregson-Holmes:** My response is the same. We would also like to know how we can link in by giving Meic the names of local people who can take complaints or concerns forward. That is why we are trying to decide which professions are able to do that, and then link into them.

[140] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you, that is helpful. Do you need the supplementary question, Joyce?

[141] **Joyce Watson:** No.

[142] **Helen Mary Jones:** The next question is specifically about independence. We have touched on this already. Could you tell us what arrangements the partnerships have in place to monitor the independence of advocacy services? How will you know whether children and young people have confidence in the independence of provision? Do you want to start with that one, Helen?

[143] **Ms Gregson-Holmes:** At the moment, we commission across health, education and social services in partnership for our advocacy service. We look at the feedback that we get, and we are looking to encourage more feedback from the children and young people who use the services. It is something that we are looking for as a region—to be stronger, really. We will encourage children and young people who use the service, as well as those who are likely to use it, to have an input into the joint commissioning arrangements. It is something that we have done, and we are not happy that we have done it well, so we want to improve it for the next round of commissioning.

[144] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is great, thank you.

[145] **Mr Diamond:** As I mentioned, the advocacy services are commissioned by the children and young people's partnerships and social services, and in that context we have joint monitoring and evaluation meetings. I believe that I provide a certain independence by sitting on that group. For instance, I feel strongly that the CYPP has its own identity, and, to give you an example, we have information on every advocacy meeting. The monitoring and evaluation meetings take place on a quarterly basis and we can go through individual issues. I am pushing an anti-bullying agenda, and if that is included in the advocacy report, that is something that I can home in on. It might be something that social services does not take as seriously, given the young people that it works with. That is just an example of how there has been a certain independence. Also, the advocacy provider sits on our core aim 5 group, and makes regular reports to it. Within that core aim 5 group we have multi-agency representation from the youth offending service and the local authority, right through to the voluntary sector. Even within that multi-agency area we are delivering information on the results of advocacy, so there is that scrutiny within that group as well.

[146] **Angela Burns:** I would like to talk about funding and stagnation. In your evidence you said that

[147] 'over recent years a number of concerns have been raised regarding the funding available by Social Services to offer an advocacy service for Looked After Children and Children in Need'.

[148] You also go on to say that this means that

[149] ‘this means vulnerable children and young people who request the service have a long time to wait before they receive help’.

[150] The children’s commissioner emphasised in his evidence the importance of not losing focus on these more vulnerable groups. How confident are you that children with statutory entitlement will be able to access these services? How confident are you about how long they might have to wait for it? If you like, that is part 1 of my question, and part 2 is: will the new framework address any issues along these lines?

[151] **Helen Mary Jones:** Helen, do you want to start? How confident are you that children with a statutory right to advocacy are now able to access it, and how long do they have to wait?

[152] **Ms Gregson-Holmes:** In Conwy—and I can only answer for Conwy—they access it immediately. There is no waiting. What we have to look at is whether more children need to access it, but do not attempt to do so. Maybe we should have a waiting list. However, at the moment, all children who want advocacy are able to access it immediately. That happens across health and education, too.

[153] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is encouraging. Phil?

[154] **Mr Diamond:** I have the same kind of comments, really. I would also like to mention that, through our monitoring and evaluation quarterly meeting, we pick up on advocacy provision, and how long people have waited and been involved with an advocate. We can scrutinise and challenge, and there is a forum to ensure that that is picked up and addressed. I am fairly confident that that is going on.

[155] **Angela Burns:** Do you think that there are long waiting lists throughout Wales for these children?

10.40 a.m.

[156] **Mr Diamond:** The difficulty—I am sorry to answer your question in a roundabout way—is in encouraging children and young people to use the service. I think that we are aware of the huge issues that we face in Blaenau Gwent and we would expect to be inundated with the number of young people wanting to use the provision, but even through robust marketing, it is very difficult to get a young person to come along and to say that they want to use an advocate. You will be well aware that young people would rather talk to their friends; they would rather talk to others than go to see a formal advocate, so we need to look at ways around that. That is why I am pleased to see the Meic service develop, because that ability to text or e-mail someone or have someone on the end of the phone is useful. We are not seeing huge waiting lists in Blaenau Gwent, but we know that there are issues, so things do not quite marry up, but that is work to be developed in the future.

[157] **Angela Burns:** I do not know who put your paper together, which was submitted on behalf of the association, but it clearly states that in Gwynedd, for example, children are not able to access advocacy services and it also clearly states that there are long waiting lists in that area. Joyce asked a question on Gwynedd earlier, so I feel that we have a paper before us which, for whatever reason, neither of you are able to talk to. That seems to be slightly self-defeating.

[158] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is a bit of a problem, but we can raise the specific questions

about the specific authorities directly with those authorities.

[159] **Mr Diamond:** I do apologise, but I am talking about the area with which I am most familiar. I agree with your comments and there are probably long waiting lists in other areas. I do not discount that fact. Please ask me different questions if I continue to go down that route.

[160] **Angela Burns:** I understand that point; it is just that your paper states that vulnerable children and young people who request the service have a long time to wait before they receive help. We just need to understand the empirical evidence to which you have been party in order to have been able to put that down in black and white.

[161] **Helen Mary Jones:** We will need to write to those authorities on that, because we need some clarity. Eleanor, you have the next set of questions.

[162] **Eleanor Burnham:** One of my questions has been answered, but I will pick up on something else. You say that marketing needs to be improved, but we know from another piece of work that has been done by another committee that youth justice, as well as children with mental health needs, is also an issue in how they access help and support. Helen, do you have any comments on how you help people who are within, or coming out of, the youth justice system as well as those with mental health problems?

[163] **Ms Gregson-Holmes:** At the moment we are looking at youth justice and child and adolescent mental health services, and the area of participation. Those are two areas that we have looked at improving this year in Conwy. We do not just look at it in the context of advocacy, but also of how they can have a voice in the first place and how they can trust people to talk to them and to try to solve their problems or issues before they reach the point where they need a formal advocate. However, it is about making that facility available for them should they feel that they need it. So, we are going back to both those services in Conwy, looking at the whole participation strategy and how young people have a voice in the service.

[164] **Mr Diamond:** I am confident that this happens in my own local area because the advocacy provider sits on the youth inclusion and support panel. I know that that is not the case in other areas, so I think that there is a variation in meeting the needs of that vulnerable group.

[165] **Eleanor Burnham:** Mae fy nghwestiwn olaf yn ymwneud â phrynu heb gontract. Gwyddom, o ganlyniad i dystiolaeth flaenorol, am yr angen i ddatblygu perthynas gyda phobl ifanc bregus. Fodd bynnag, pa mor gyffredin yw'r arfer o brynu heb gontract a pha mor debygol yw hynny o gynyddu yn wyneb pwysau a chyllidebau lleol? Sut y gellir cynnal a datblygu gwasanaeth o safon?

Eleanor Burnham: My last question deals with spot purchasing. We know from previous evidence of the need to develop relationships with vulnerable young people. However, how common is the practice of spot purchasing and how likely is it to increase in the face of pressure and local budgets? How will it be possible to maintain and develop a high-quality service?

[166] **Helen Mary Jones:** Did you get that, Helen?

[167] **Ms Gregson-Holmes:** Yes.

[168] **Helen Mary Jones:** Spot purchasing—we do not like it. *[Laughter.]*

[169] **Ms Gregson-Holmes:** Are you talking about spot purchasing as in getting children and young people to look at—

[170] **Eleanor Burnham:** I am talking about the spot purchasing of advocates to fill gaps, for whatever reason that is necessary, and the fact that, if people are advocating only on an on-and-off basis, they are not developing relationships with young people. There is also pressure on the budgets.

[171] **Helen Mary Jones:** So, is there a risk that there will be more spot purchasing, as Eleanor says, if the situation regarding the finances becomes more difficult?

[172] **Ms Gregson-Holmes:** No. In Conwy, we already have volunteer advocates. There are many professionals in our volunteer group, and there are professionals from other fields apart from social services, health or education. They will see a child through an entire complaint, and will develop the relationship. So, we do not go out to buy a service; we are backfilling with volunteers, who are trained and professional.

[173] **Mr Diamond:** I agree with the comments made. I do not think that a relationship can flourish if we spot purchase. We have discussed undertaking spot purchasing at a regional level. In looking at advocacy across five authorities, we felt that we could develop a framework that was consistent across the board but, where areas had different needs, spot purchasing could be undertaken within the contract. I think that that could work because there would be one provider, and, for example, if there is a need for advocacy for children with disabilities in Monmouthshire, as opposed to Blaenau Gwent, for whatever reason, Monmouthshire can make that spot purchase within the contract. That could work. We have not undertaken spot purchasing in Blaenau Gwent, and I do not think that anyone else has, to my knowledge.

[174] **Helen Mary Jones:** The children's commissioner has told us that he is worried about it, and he has so much to worry about that he does not raise concerns unless they are genuine. I know that we are close to running out of time, but I think, Joyce, that it would be good to touch on the question on inspection. So, we will move on to question 23, if that is okay with you.

[175] **Joyce Watson:** We have heard from Voices from Care, which has raised issues about the potential impact of inspection and regulation on smaller providers of advocacy. It is concerned that the softer and longer-term outcomes need to be captured and reported. Do you have a view on what the arrangements for inspection and regulation should be? The children's commissioner suggests that Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales should be responsible for inspection and regulation, working alongside Estyn and Health Inspectorate Wales. Do you share that view?

[176] **Mr Diamond:** I will start, if that is okay, Helen. I share that view, and we have talked at a national level about reducing the number of inspections and about having joint inspections. If you were to inspect advocacy provision in a silo, you would not get the real impact of the service. So, assessing or inspecting as part of a social care and education inspection would be more favourable. That is the view of my advocacy provider as well. So, I agree wholeheartedly with that.

[177] **Helen Mary Jones:** Helen, do you have a view about who should be inspecting?

[178] **Ms Gregson-Holmes:** I agree with Phil.

[179] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you, that is helpful.

[180] I will draw this item to a close by thanking Phil and Helen. I am especially grateful to Helen, as I know that it is very difficult to give evidence via a video link, but it does mean

that we can talk to people without having to drag them all the way down to Cardiff. It is important to us to get perspectives from outside south-east Wales on these sorts of issues. I very much appreciate your time and your patience. We have had less trouble with this video link than we have had with some. Thank you, Phil, for your evidence. There will be some written questions that arise from the paper, but we will ask the clerk to take advice about how those should be addressed appropriately.

10.50 a.m.

Cynnig Trefniadol Procedural Motion

[181] **Helen Mary Jones:** Cynigiau fod **Helen Mary Jones:** I move that
*y pwyllgor yn penderfynu gwahardd y the committee resolves to exclude the public
cyhoedd o weddill y cyfarfod yn unol â Rheol from the remainder of the meeting in
Sefydlog Rhif 10.37(vi). accordance with Standing Order No.
10.37(vi).*

[182] Gwelaf fod y pwyllgor yn gytûn. I see that the committee is in agreement.

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.
Motion agreed.*

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 10.50 p.m.
The public part of the meeting ended at 10.50 p.m.*