



NEWS RELEASE

Current Children's Commissioner for Wales publishes plans to undertake first review

The Children's Commissioner for Wales has today announced plans to use his statutory powers to review the provision of independent professional advocacy for looked-after children and young people, care leavers and children in need.

Currently, under the Children Act 1989 and Adoption and Children Act 2002, every local authority has a statutory obligation to provide an independent professional 'voice', also known as an advocate, for every looked after child and young person, care leaver and child in need who want to take part or comment on decisions about their lives. Advocates should also be provided if the child or young person wants to make a complaint.

Keith Towler will, for the first time as Commissioner, use powers and functions derived from the Care Standards Act 2000 and the Children's Commissioner for Wales Regulations 2001 to review the independent professional advocacy service arrangements of Welsh Ministers and all local authorities in Wales. He will attempt to ascertain whether, and to what extent, the arrangements are effective in safeguarding and promoting the rights and welfare of children and young people.

The Review was prompted by a number of instances brought to the Commissioner's attention whereby some professionals within local authorities were unaware of their statutory obligation to provide an advocate for these children and young people. In other cases, vulnerable children were going without an advocate because they were unaware of their statutory entitlement to receive support.

In addition to reviewing the advocacy service arrangements of Welsh Ministers and all local authorities in Wales, the Commissioner will also consult with looked-after children and young

people, care leavers and children in need across Wales. He also intends to undertake a scoping exercise looking at practice across the UK as well as consult with a range of bodies with mandates relevant to the review.

Marking the tenth anniversary of his Office, Keith Towler said:

"I am very concerned that some children and young people within these vulnerable groups are being denied access to an independent professional advocate. The role of the advocate is to support the child and to help the child understand what's being discussed and agreed. Central to that role is ensuring that all those involved listen to the views expressed by the child and or to communicate those views on behalf of the child. This is particularly important when decisions are being made about their lives. Currently, for some children and young people, decisions are being made about them without them.

"It seems that lack of awareness among professionals of their statutory obligation is one of the main obstacles and as such some of Wales' most vulnerable children and young people remain unaware of their entitlement to have an independent professional advocate to represent their views, someone they can trust and a person who'll make sure their voice is heard.

"I want this review to highlight the main issues, to provide local authorities and others the opportunity to learn lessons so that ultimately we can ensure these vulnerable groups of children and young people, some of whose experiences have informed my decision to Review, never go without the services of an independent professional advocate when they need one."

The Commissioner will publish the findings of his review in early 2012.

ENDS

For more information or to arrange an interview with Keith Towler or a Welsh language spokesperson, please contact Sara Young on 01792 765638, 07794 123132 or email sara.young@childcomwales.org.uk