
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT

Date Written	18 th January 2021
Report Author	Lowri Morgan
Service Area	Adult Social Care
Committee Date	3 rd February 2021

To: Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen

Adult Advocacy Strategy

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The report sets out the Adult Services Advocacy and how it relates to Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council's strategic Wellbeing Priorities.
- 1.2 The strategy sets out the strategic direction for advocacy services for Adult Social Care in the coming three years.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That the Scrutiny Committee discusses and comments on the issues set out in the report.

3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Advocacy is taking action to help people say what they want, secure their rights, represent their interests, and obtain services they need. Advocates and advocacy providers work in partnership with the people they support and take their side. Advocacy promotes social inclusion, equality, and social justice. It aims to make things happen in the most direct and empowering ways possible. It recognises that self-advocacy – whereby people, perhaps with encouragement and support, speak out and act on their own behalf – is the ultimate aim.

- 3.2 The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 places certain duties on local authorities to ensure that people are able to make informed choices and participate in decisions that affect them in relation to their care and support needs. The key provisions of the Act relating to information and advocacy are:
- Section 17 which requires local authorities to ensure that information, advice and assistance relating to care and support services is available.
 - Section 181 which states that local authorities may be required to arrange for advocacy services to be made available to people who are in need of care and support.

In addition, the Welsh Government has issued the Part 10 Code of Practice (Advocacy), which requires local authorities to:

- ensure that advocacy services are available to enable people to participate in decision-making by local authorities; and
 - in certain circumstances, to provide an independent professional advocate.
- 3.3 During the inspection of Adult Services by Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW), advocacy was identified as an area for development for adult services inspection in September 2019. Advocacy is also identified within the Local Authority Recovery, Transformation and Improvement plan.
- 3.4 Within Adult Services we have worked to co-produce the Advocacy Strategy with service users and professionals including extensive collaboration and consultation with the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Advocacy Forum.
- 3.5 Whilst the coproduction work was on-going staff guidance was issued to support Care Managers in their approach to advocacy and the offer of advocacy to adults.

4.0 WHERE WE WERE

- 4.1 Whilst advocacy services were available to individuals they were often only utilised at the point where an individual was unable to make a decision in respect of critical decisions in their life, such as moving into care or as part of the deprivation of liberty arrangements.
- 4.2 There was a need to strengthen the initial assessment arrangements so that advocacy was considered at any initial assessment as part of the “What Matters” conversation.
- 4.3 Merthyr Tydfil CBC did not have a clear strategy in respect of how advocacy services are provided in line with the requirements of the Social Services & Wellbeing Act. The absence of a clear Advocacy strategy was identified by CIW, during their inspection in 2019:

‘The local authority needs to ensure sufficient formal advocacy to meet statutory duties and assure itself practitioners are confident in promoting the service.’

- 4.4 Consultation with citizens identified a lack of understanding of what advocacy was and when would be the most appropriate time to use it.
- 4.5 Although the local authority currently spot purchases advocacy services the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Advocacy forum identified that despite having its place spot purchasing advocacy services cannot always support sustainability amongst the advocacy sector and does not allow resilience to be built for periods when there is a spike in demand.

5.0 WHERE WE ARE NOW

- 5.1 In order to improve our understanding of the need for advocacy locally we have undertaken the following steps:
- Developed an advocacy guidance document for staff.
 - Undertaken a review of the advocacy data collected within Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS).
 - Sought to improve our data collection by allocating mandatory fields within WCCIS around what advocacy has been offered.
 - Worked with the Cwm Taf Morgannwg advocacy forum to coproduce the advocacy strategy.
 - Appointed a Senior Social Worker within the Initial Support Service who has been tasked with working with Assessment & Review Officers to strengthen the inclusion of the consideration of advocacy support at the commencement of the assessment process.

As a result of the changes made, we are optimistic that our data will better reflect the correct levels of need for advocacy within Merthyr Tydfil.

- 5.2 A draft Advocacy Strategy (Appendix 1) has been developed outlining the direction of travel for advocacy services. Whilst it was hoped that there would have been greater co-production of the strategy with people who use the service this was not achievable due to the pandemic and to address this the strategy will be reviewed after a year.

6.0 WHERE WE WANT TO BE

- 6.1 The purpose of the strategy is to provide a clear direction for the development of advocacy services for Adults over the next three years.
- 6.2 The strategy is based on the current position and legislative framework which can be subject to change and should this occur then the strategy will be refined to reflect these changes.
- 6.3 We will continue to work on a regional basis to identify how more specialist services will be developed across the region in order to maximise both the use of available resources and enhance the range of services closer to the individual's community.

6.4 The areas identified in the strategy are:

- Work with stakeholders including those who have accessed advocacy in the past to identify what is important to them in relation to advocacy provision.
- Review and improve data collection mechanisms to ensure we are appropriately mapping demand in Merthyr Tydfil including consideration of the increase in demand for advocacy for parents of children involved with social services.
- Raise the profile of advocacy across our staff teams including exploring potential training opportunities and utilising the tools provided by the Golden Thread Advocacy Programme and Social Care Wales.
- Review the current provision of advocacy services across Merthyr Tydfil.
- Work to identify resources required to fund appropriate levels of advocacy in Merthyr Tydfil.
- Work with advocacy providers to enhance commissioning opportunities based on the improved data collection.
- Review the efficacy of any commissioned advocacy services.
- Continue to raise the profile of advocacy including its benefits to professionals and citizens.
- Review this strategy and further develop commissioned advocacy across the region if appropriate.

7.0 WHAT WE NEED TO DO NEXT

7.1 We are committed to undertake the following:

- Work regionally to expand the advocacy offer for our citizens reviewing and adopting best practice where appropriate.
- Improve our data collection fields in WCCIS so that the offer of advocacy becomes a mandatory field with justification for advocacy not being offered.
- Utilise enhanced data to ensure we are taking the correct approach to the commissioning of services including consideration of the increase in demand for advocacy for parents whose children are involved with social services.
- Review provision of advocacy services and promote their use in Merthyr Tydfil as appropriate.
- Develop and improve training on advocacy to ensure that the correct information on the benefits of engaging in advocacy are being shared with potential service users.

8.0 CONTRIBUTION TO WELLBEING OBJECTIVES

8.1 The advocacy strategy for Adult Social care links with the following strategic objectives:

- Healthier Wales.
- Focus on the Future Local Authority wellbeing objective of Living Well
- The PSB objective of Lifestyles, Health & Vulnerability.
- The political priorities of “We will look after all our citizens by providing quality education and social care enabling everyone to lead their lives to their full potential” and “We will encourage lifestyles and promote wellbeing.”

LISA CURTIS JONES
CHIEF OFFICER (SOCIAL SERVICES)

COUNCILLOR CHRIS DAVIES
CABINET MEMBER FOR
SOCIAL SERVICES

BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Title of Document(s)	Document(s) Date	Document Location
Adult Services Advocacy Strategy 2020 - 2023		
Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?		No