**Gwent Regional Advocacy: information pack**

**OVERVIEW**

**1. Background**

In response to new statutory requirements for advocacy placed on local authorities by the SSWb Act and Part 10 Code of Practice (Advocacy), Gwent Regional Partnership Board have, through the Area Plan, made advocacy one of the regional priorities.

A regional commissioning strategy for adult advocacy in Gwent has been co-produced over two years with a wide range of stakeholders. Titled ‘*Our Vision and Intentions for Adult Advocacy*, *2019-24*’ the strategy was launched at Gwent Citizens Panel on 18 July 2019. It can be accessed via the links at the end of this document.

A new ICF funded advocacy helpline called Gwent Access to Advocacy went live the same day, as part of a phased roll out (Torfaen first, followed by Blaenau Gwent, Monmouthshire, Caerphilly and Newport).

This overview briefly explains the background to these developments and what it means for social care and health professionals. More detail is available in the regional commissioning strategy itself. The pack consists of this overview, a decision making flow chart, a referral pathway and an aide memoir to assist with making referrals.

**2. About advocacy**

Alison Hoskins’ foreword to ‘*Our vision and Intentions’* states that: “Advocacy is one way of supporting people to express what they want from support and services, and to have this taken into account when decisions are being made that affect them. We regard advocacy as being complementary to the role of social workers, who also provide a type of ‘formal’ advocacy. We also recognise that there is a fundamental difference between these roles. Whereas social services are required by law to act in what they consider to be individuals’ best interests, advocates are primarily concerned with supporting people to express their views, wishes and feelings. Independence is key to the role of advocacy.”

In his foreword, RPB Chair Phil Robson says: “Advocacy has a vital part to play in making sure that all voices are heard. We recognize that this is an important service that needs to be available equitably, where and when needed. This has to be understood across both social care and health, and is a key message for all our staff.”

**3. Commissioning approach**

The statutory requirements for advocacy are set out in paragraph 7 on the Part 10 Code of Practice. ‘*Our Vision and Intentions’’* seeks to meet and, where possible, go beyond these requirements. It takes a balanced approach, ensuring that statutory Independent Professional Advocacy (IPA) can be arranged for some people in the social services system, whilst also supporting development of the wider advocacy sector.

**4. Co-production, engagement & consultation**

Between March 2018 and January 2019, an extensive programme of engagement and consultation took place to ensure that the commissioning strategy is fit for purpose. This identified a number of key issues which ‘*Our Vision and Intentions’* seeks to address. At the same time, a unique structure was put in place to support development of the commissioning strategy, consisting of an advocacy commissioners steering group, an advocacy providers network, a citizens advocacy reference group and an advocacy co-production forum. The latter brings together representatives of the other stakeholder groups to share power and responsibility for decision making.

**5. Gwent Access to Advocacy**

Following completion of the consultation phase, Heads of Adult Services supported a successful ICF bid for a two year pilot project. Named ‘Gwent Access to Advocacy’, this was designed to meet three objectives:

• establish an independent single point of access to adult advocacy services to ensure that individuals receive the most appropriate form of advocacy

• run a high profile advocacy awareness raising campaign for both the public and social care and health professionals

• build the capacity of the advocacy sector to manage increasing demand

Data from the pilot will also enable commissioners to identify gaps in provision and map demand more accurately, so providing important information to commissioners that will help shape the design of a future regional advocacy service.

Cardiff-based social enterprise ProMo-Cymru was invited to provide the phone helpline, which is similar to services they provide in other areas. The organisation also provides Welsh Government’s Meic information helpline for children and young people. ProMo-Cymru does not provide face-to-face advocacy; their independence from local authorities, the NHS and advocacy providers ensures that individuals receive the most appropriate form of face-to-face advocacy.

It should be noted that the helpline will signpost and refer only to advocacy services. Individuals whose needs are determined to require other forms of support will be referred to the relevant IAA service or community hub.

Professionals are encouraged to access the helpline for advice on any aspect of advocacy, as well as for making referrals. The helpline is also open to self-referrals.

Following the launch date in each locality, citizens may continue to self-refer to advocacy providers but ***all*** referrals for advocacy from practitioners must be made via the helpline, with reference to the aide memoir. This will enable meaningful data to be captured for future commissioning.

However, note that the existing arrangements for advocacy referrals in Newport remain the same, i.e. Dewis CIL will continue to be the point of contact. Should ProMo-Cymru receive any advocacy referrals from Newport they will be directed to Dewis CIL. Similarly, the existing arrangements for accessing the ABUHB MH advocacy service provided by Dewis CIL remain unchanged.

**6. Raising awareness and understanding of advocacy**

Advocacy is quite difficult to fully understand. Advocates require a specific set of skills and knowledge. Statutory IPA under the SSWb Act must be provided by trained and paid independent advocates and is considered to be on a par with IMCA and IMHA.

The awareness raising campaign is a vital part of the project and a working group has formed to design and oversee it. It is likely that this will lead to development of a network of advocacy champions. This aims to enable effective outreach into marginalised communities and also help raise awareness of the independent advocacy role in social work practice.

**7.** **Capacity building**

It is anticipated that successful implementation of the phone helpline and awareness raising campaign may lead to increased demand for advocacy services. Some funding has therefore been set aside to support existing advocacy providers with additional capacity.

**8.** **Access to ‘*Our Vision and Intentions for Adult Advocacy, 2019-24’***

English:

<https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/fileadmin/documents/Resident/Health_and_Social_Care/Information_Leaflets/15415_Our_Vision_2019-24_.pdf>

Welsh:

<https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/fileadmin/documents/Resident/Health_and_Social_Care/Information_Leaflets_Cym/15415_Our_Vision_2019-24_WELSH.pdf>

END