

Here4me – Action for Children
PROTOCOL FOR THE PROVISION OF ADVOCACY
for West Berkshire

Approved January 16

Advocacy Outline

National Standards for the provision of Children's Advocacy Services (DoH 2002)

'From April 2004 all local authorities with social services responsibilities must ensure that advocacy services are provided for children and young people making or intending to make a complaint under section 24D or section 26 of the Children Act 1989 (DfES 2004).'

- **The services outlined in this Protocol complies with the following:**
 - Advocacy is led by the views and wishes of children and young people.
 - Advocacy champions the rights and needs of children and young people.
 - All advocacy services have clear policies to promote equalities issues and monitor services to ensure that no young person is discriminated against due to age, gender, race, culture, religion, language, disability or sexual orientation.
 - Advocacy provides help and advice quickly when it is requested.
 - Advocacy works exclusively for children and young people.

- The Advocacy Service operates to a high level of confidentiality and ensures that children, young people and other agencies are aware of its confidentiality policies.
- Advocacy listens to the views and ideas of children and young people in order to improve the service provided.
- The advocacy service works with West Berks to provide an effective and easy to use complaints procedure.
- Advocacy is well publicised, accessible and easy to use.

Service Provision

The outcomes that the Service is required to contribute to are divided into three areas:

1. Children & Young People are enabled to raise issues of complaint or concern and supported through the complaint process.
2. Children & Young People have their voice, thoughts & views heard at professional meetings. The Advocate can speak on behalf of the child/young person or support them whilst they speak for themselves.
3. Children & Young People to have improved knowledge of their legal and service entitlements and to feel more confident in similar future situations.

Advocates do not attend core group meetings, unless there is a compelling reason expressed by the young person themselves. The only exception to this is where a young person has not made use of an advocate in the past and the core group offers the most appropriate opportunity for their thoughts and wishes to be recorded.

The introduction of a statutory requirement for 'Missing from placement interviews' post dates the service level agreement and so falls outside the service currently being offered. Service provision in this area would have to be negotiated separately.

Eligibility and Referrals

Currently, the Advocacy Service is being offered to all young people working with West Berks between the ages of six – 18, although this age range can be extended where a specific need can be demonstrated. Provision is also provided to West Berks's looked after children and care leavers up to the age of 25, including those

with disabilities. The advocacy service is also available to teenage mothers whose babies are subject to CP.

Professional referrals

The Action for Children Here4me Project requires a completed referral form from Children's Services.

This must include;

- The young persons'; name, date of birth and contact details
- School details
- Date, time, venue and type of meeting at which advocacy is required or a request for assistance with a representation.
- A completed risk assessment
- Brief background to the referral (where appropriate)

The Social Worker must also seek permission for a young person to be seen by an advocate from the person with Parental Responsibility and record their agreement to advocacy involvement either on the referral form or by email. Where this is not granted the advocate has no right to meet with a young person. (Currently no written notification of intent to see a young person is provided to either the young person or to those with PR).

A single referral can be completed where siblings require advocacy, however, this must make clear:-

- which child or children require an advocate.
- any individual requirements.
- individual risk assessments. (Children will not be seen outside school without an adequate risk assessment)

Self-referrals

Where young people self-refer, Here4me will seek the required information from Children's Services.

Required Paper Work

Children's Services will ensure that Here4me is included on all appropriate circulation lists to ensure receipt of;

- Invitations to all appropriate meetings (e.g. CPC's, LAC reviews, PEP's)
- Notifications of date changes

- Meeting Records and agreed Plans.

Service Delivery

Allocation of Advocates

The service offers both male and female advocates and any preference expressed by the young person or the social worker will be taken into consideration where possible.

Advocates will be allocated on the understanding that wherever possible, the same advocate will remain with a young person throughout the time a young person requires an advocate.

Where this is not possible, the young person will be asked how they would like to proceed.

This can mean that the allocated advocate will carry out a pre-meeting and a report will then either be sent directly to the Chair or another advocate will present the report.

Where sibling groups are referred for advocacy, the same advocate will usually be allocated to all siblings. However, where conflicts exist between siblings, the sibling group is greater than three, or where the siblings attend a number of different schools, more than one advocate will typically be allocated.

Pre-meetings

The advocate will arrange a pre-meeting with the young person, usually during the week before the meeting date. Pre-meetings are generally carried out in school, as this offers a safe environment for the young person.

Where the young person's school attendance is poor or where they have expressed a preference not to be seen at school, an alternative venue will be sort.

Advocates meet with each of their allocated young people separately and carry out a 1:1 meeting. During the pre-meeting, the role of the advocate is to obtain and record the young person's thoughts and feelings and discuss how the young person would like their information to be presented. These meetings do not have a pre-arranged agenda and the direction of conversation is directed by the young person.

Where specific concerns have been raised by the social worker, the advocate will raise these, however will not pursue matters which the young person does not wish to discuss.

A transcript of this meeting is agreed between the young person and the advocate. Where this contains sensitive information, it is discussed with the young person how they would like this information to be presented.

The information contained within this transcript remains the property of the young person until it has been presented.

The only exception to 1:1 meetings is where an interpreter is required or where the family refuses to give permission to see a young person unless a member of staff from school or a key worker is present.

Where a young person requests that someone else attends an advocacy meeting with them, this will be accommodated by the advocate in a way which they believe to be most appropriate at the time.

How advocacy information is presented at meetings

Until information is presented at the meeting, it belongs to the young person alone. They can change their mind at any point about what they wish to be included or excluded. The only exception to this is, if a young person discloses something which is likely to cause harm or which is illegal. This information will need to be passed on to relevant professionals. These exceptions are made clear to all young people at each advocacy meeting.

All information will be presented according to the young person's wishes, whether this is for the young person to present all or part of their information, or for the advocate to present the information on behalf of a young person who may or may not be present at the meeting.

In line with legislation there is a presumption that young people will, where possible, be invited to attend all or part of the meetings in which decisions are being made about their lives and that it will be the young person's choice which determines how they participate.

A young person's views are generally reported verbatim. Advocates may give some basic details on how and where the information was gathered and if relevant, give an indication of a young person's emotional state at the time. The advocate should not express their personal opinions on any of the information being presented.

Advocates are not permitted to vote on the outcomes of CPC's.

Advocates will prepare a short written report following each meeting or conversation with a young person, which will be included in the young person's Here4me file.

Where requested a transcript of particularly long statements made by young people during Child Protection Conferences can be provided for inclusion in the meeting record.

An advocate will attend meetings either with or on behalf of a young person. Where a young person attends the meeting, how information is fed back at conference will be determined by the young person. The young person may choose to talk themselves, allow the advocate to talk, or a mixture of both. This arrangement is very flexible and the advocate will respond to the wishes of the young person as the meeting progresses.

Third Party Information

Advocates can be asked to leave the room during the presentation of third party information; however, it can be useful to some young people if the advocate stays in the room. This can reassure the young person that only third party information was discussed and that no decisions were made about their future during their absence.

Requests

All requests regarding the advocacy and Independent Visitor Service should be directed to the Here4me office and not to the attending advocate.

Advocate Help

An advocate can help a young person in the preparation of a representation or complaint.

The advocate will help the young person write and bullet point the reason for the representation or complaint. The advocate will also encourage the young person to detail the outcomes they would like to see. The statement will be written up, checked by the young person and signed by the young person. The advocate may meet with the young person on a few occasions to ensure the young person is happy with the final copy of the representation or complaint.

The representation or complaint will be sent by the Here4me co-ordinator to the West Berkshire complaints officer. The co-ordinator will keep the young person informed of time scales and any further relevant information.

When the representation or complaint response has been received, the advocate will go through this with the young person to ensure they understand and are happy with the response. The advocate will support the young person with any further actions required.

Service Promotion

Here4me – Action for Children and West Berkshire will work together to promote the Advocacy Service to young people;

- West Berks to promote the service to the staff of West Berk's Children's Social Care, through written information and attendance at team meetings and ensure the roles of advocates and independent visitors are understood and integrated within their work with children & young people.
- Here4me co-coordinators to regularly attend social work team meetings and Looked After Children Care Council meetings/activities to promote the Service.
- Both parties to ensure that information is in plain English and is accessible through provision in a range of formats.

Advocate Management

All advocates will have an allocated co-ordinator that oversees their cases.

Here4me has a rigorous programme of supervision for all Advocates. Whilst the co-ordinators are available to discuss on-going concerns with advocates, supervision gives them the opportunity to have a face to face discussion about the more general issues surrounding working with young people as well as issues directly pertaining to the young person.

Training

All advocates will be required to attend the initial Here4me Action for Children Advocacy Training course and will subsequently have been approved by an interview panel. They will also hold an enhanced DBS certificate.

Each advocate will also complete the mandatory safeguarding training designated by Here4me on an annual basis.

West Berkshire to ensure IROs & social workers contribute to ongoing Volunteer Training and sit in on interview panels.

[WBC Advocacy Protocol](#)