

# Advocacy Counts 9

**A review of advocacy services for adults in Wales  
with a particular focus on older people**



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# 1. Executive Summary

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## **Advocacy Counts 9 provides an updated snapshot of advocacy provision in Wales for adults, with a particular emphasis on older people.**

The overall numbers of people supported, paid advocates and services funded to deliver advocacy across Wales have all decreased since the last survey was reported in 2022. There has been a small increase in the number of advocacy services specifically for older people and a significant increase in the number of volunteer advocates working in a variety of advocacy services across Wales.

Our analysis was enhanced by follow-up interviews with some respondents, along with discussions at advocacy network meetings across Wales. These revealed that many of the reductions in provision are because of real terms funding reductions. These reductions are reported to have resulted from the continued lack of Welsh Government funding for commissioning independent professional advocacy (IPA), in contrast to the funding provided to commission the other statutory forms of advocacy, and restrictions to the budgets offered by statutory commissioners. Often, funding is uncertain and short-term, with one year funding extensions offered at the last minute.

As anticipated during previous Advocacy Counts surveys, the fulfillment of statutory requirements for advocacy commissioning has diverted funding away from other forms of lower level, preventative, community-based advocacy, resulting in a reduced range of these services and some organisations ceasing to exist or offer advocacy.

With the cost-of-living crisis impacting on many people across Wales, increases in the numbers and complexity of referrals have put

more pressure on advocacy services at a time when the majority have reduced finances, services, and advocates. A significant and exponential increase in parental advocacy cases and a reduction in the range and number of other support services to signpost people to has also increased the pressure on advocacy services. The overall increased demand and complexity of cases has resulted in fewer people being able to be supported and many organisations implementing waiting lists for the first time.

The cost-of-living crisis and high levels of inflation have also impacted personally on many advocates. These challenges have been exacerbated by the lack of increases in advocates' salaries, which are generally perceived to be lower than those of similarly skilled and qualified professions. The increased complexity of casework has put more pressure on advocates. For many organisations it has therefore become increasingly challenging to retain and recruit advocates.

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**Despite these challenges advocates across Wales continue to strive to offer the best support possible to people seeking help to understand their rights and have their voice heard.**

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Age Cymru is pleased to note the increase in the number of specialist advocacy services for older people, whilst concerned at the lower number of organisations and paid advocates specifically supporting older people. The overall reductions in wider support that older people could access is also concerning, resulting in fewer opportunities for older people to access advocacy services focusing on early intervention, prevention, and community-based advocacy.

# 2. A review of advocacy services for adults in Wales with a particular focus on older people

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## Introduction

We are pleased to present Advocacy Counts 9, our 9th report on advocacy provision for adults in Wales with a particular emphasis on older people.

Over the last 18 years, Age Cymru has reviewed the availability of advocacy services, issues around funding and sustainability of advocacy services, the quality of service, training of advocates, the role of advocacy in safeguarding, accessibility in terms of language and knowledge and understanding of legislative changes in advocacy.

Our evidence has been used to influence grant funders, commissioners and Ministers in Welsh Government. We've called for an end to the postcode lottery of availability, for a more consistent funding approach, for increased sustainability of the sector and most importantly for people who need the support of these services to have access wherever they are in Wales. We also called for a new statutory duty for advocacy under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act (the Act).

Independent advocacy is a vital service for individuals to ensure that the person (and their well-being outcomes) is placed at the centre of the work of support services. Independent advocacy gives citizens voice, choice and control over achieving their well-being outcomes.

There have been significant developments in the field of independent advocacy in the period between Advocacy Counts 5 (2016), and Advocacy Counts 9 (2024). The Act places a requirement on local authorities to make advocacy available for all individuals in Wales in certain circumstances including (but not exclusively) assessment, care planning,

review, and safeguarding. Nearly all local authorities have now commissioned services to comply with these requirements with many having reviewed and re-tendered these services at least once. Advocacy Counts 8 was undertaken during the Coronavirus pandemic and this most recent survey has been undertaken during the subsequent cost of living crisis. Both cover particularly challenging periods for advocacy services, advocates, and clients.

Advocacy Counts 9 presents the findings from our most recent survey. It explores the findings in light of the continued requirement for commissioned independent professional advocacy services and the need for a wide range of other forms of advocacy at a time of increased financial challenges for all stakeholders. Advocacy Counts 9 will provide a broad snapshot of the current situation in Wales.

## Methodology

An online survey was used to distribute our questions to providers. We have extensive knowledge of the advocacy sector in Wales but undertook a further desk top exercise to ensure we engaged with as many providers as possible.

The Advocacy Counts survey respondents are self-selecting. Responses are sought from organisations that are funded to deliver advocacy services for adults across Wales. Information is also gathered on the support that is given to older people either through dedicated services or as part of the wider client group. Despite our best efforts, we can't guarantee we have data from 100% of providers.

The data which we collected was longitudinal, and therefore mirrored the other surveys in our series. We have extracted data to paint the fullest picture of advocacy services in Wales, and therefore, useful to commissioners, providers and citizens alike.

We originally sent the survey out in January 2024, making direct contact with as many providers as we could, including those we'd already received responses from to previous surveys.

## Key Findings

**Our last survey Advocacy Counts 8 was conducted in 2022. Here we record the 2024 results against our 2022 findings:**

- There has been a small increase in the number of advocacy services (from 19 to 20) specifically for older people.
- There has been a 19% drop in services providing advocacy to adults of all ages across Wales. The decrease is from 89 to 72 services.
- There are 30 paid and 128 volunteer advocates delivering advocacy specifically to older people. This combined figure of 158 has increased 20%.
- There are 142 full time paid advocates working in all advocacy services across Wales. This figure has reduced by 5% since 2022.
- There are 64 part-time paid advocates which is a decrease of 19%.
- There are 171 volunteer advocates working in a variety of advocacy services across Wales. This is nearly 50% higher than the figure in Advocacy Counts 8.
- The total number of older people supported across all services over the last 12 months was 7,831, a decrease of over 1,000 from Advocacy Counts 8.
- 815 fewer older people were supported by advocacy services funded specifically for older people than in 2022. This is a 13% reduction.
- The total number of people supported across all services in Wales over the last 12 months fell by 35% to 12,760.
- Nearly half the organisations completing the survey operate an active waiting list.
- Services specifically funded for older people continue to exist in all 22 local authority areas in Wales. Services for a wider client group continue to cover all local authorities.
- At the time the survey was undertaken, one local authority area in Wales hadn't commissioned their IPA services as required by the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.



## Number of services and people supported

	Advocacy Counts 5 2016	Advocacy Counts 6 2018	Advocacy Counts 7 2020	Advocacy Counts 8 2022	Advocacy Counts 9 2024
Total number of respondents	22	21	33	27	21
Number of services funded specifically for older people	19	13	12	19	20
Number of organisations providing these services	13	7	6	10	9
Number of other funded advocacy services where older people are part of the client group	44	41	76	89	72
Number of organisations providing these services	15	18	30	24	21
Total number of people supported	Not asked	10,402	16,909	19,592	12,760
Total number of older people supported	6,412	5,466	8,153	9,090	7,831
Number of Local Authority areas with services funded for a wider client group	22	22	22	22	22
Number of Local Authority areas with services specifically funded for older people	17	15	15	22	22

Please note that one provider may have more than one advocacy service, and some will have services specifically for older people as well as services for a wider client group.



## Advocacy staff and volunteers

	Advocacy Counts 7 2020		Advocacy Counts 8 2022		Advocacy Counts 9 2024	
	Older people services	All service types	Older people services	All service types	Older people services	All service types
Full Time	8	99	23	150	16	142
Part Time	10	69	18	79	14	64
Volunteer	13	127	91	117	128	171

### Advocacy services funded specifically for older people (50+) in Wales

Our survey suggests that there are 20 services funded specifically for older people compared to 19 in 2022. The number of organisations providing those services has decreased from 10 to nine. Four of the organisations provide one advocacy service each, two provide two services each, two provide three services with the remaining organisation providing six services.

The number of older people supported directly by these services during the previous 12 months has decreased, falling from 6,220 in 2022 to 5,405 in 2024. Overall, the number advocates has increased from 132 in 2022 to 158 in 2024, with a decrease in the number of paid advocates being outweighed by a significant increase in the number of volunteer advocates. Paid advocates will generally deal with more complex cases, often within the statutory forms of advocacy, whereas volunteer advocates generally deal with lower level, preventative cases.

Respondents to our survey reported that they are funded to provide a broad spread of advocacy services across the categories listed in Part 10 Code of Practice (Advocacy) that accompanies The Act. Geographically, advocacy services specifically for older people continue to be available in all areas of Wales

in part due to two nationally funded projects. In 2020, organisations specifically supporting older people only existed in 15 local authority areas. In addition to this, older people may also be able to access support from services with a wider client group as all local authority areas have at least seven different types of advocacy services, as identified through the mapping of advocacy services undertaken with the support of services attending the advocacy network meetings across Wales.

### Advocacy services for a wider client group but older people are supported as part of the service

The number of responses to the Advocacy Counts 9 survey has reduced compared to the previous undertaking of the survey. 21 organisations completed this survey compared to 27 in 2022. This represents a return to the response rates received prior to the Advocacy Counts 7 survey where a maximum of just over 20 responded to each of the previous surveys. As a result of this reduction, the overall figures for all areas of service delivery, for services that support adults of all ages, have decreased when compared to the previous report from 2022.

Since 2022 the number of services providing advocacy to a wider client group where older people are also supported has reduced by 19% to 72 in 2024. The number of people supported by these services has also reduced

from 19,592 to 12,760 in 2024. Overall, the total number of older people receiving advocacy support has also reduced from 9,090 to 7,831.

The number of organisations providing these services was 21. The number of full-time and part-time advocates have fallen slightly; however, the number of volunteer advocates has increased significantly by nearly 50% from 117 to 171 in 2024.

Nearly half of the organisations are currently operating an active waiting list. This question hadn't been asked previously as very few, if any, had mentioned having waiting lists prior to 2022. Discussions during regional advocacy network meetings had indicated a significant increase in waiting lists and that it would be useful to record and monitor over future Advocacy Counts surveys.

The number of local authority areas where independent professional advocacy commissioned under The Act is now being delivered continues to be 21. The one local authority area that has yet to formally commission advocacy services under The Act spot purchases advocacy support when required.

There continues to be a complete geographical coverage of some form of advocacy services for a wider client group in each local authority area across Wales. However, whilst there continues to be a range of different types of advocacy services delivered across Wales, it isn't as varied or as extensive as previously reported. Building on the results of the survey, Age Cymru continue to map the range of advocacy services in each local authority area in Wales<sup>1</sup>, undertaking follow-up interviews where necessary. The results show that some non-statutory forms of advocacy are no longer available in some areas, often as a result of the reduction or removal of the funding for the organisations providing these services.

### Some additional comments made by services include:

“I think that local authorities need to look at the impact of the IPA contracts on the provision of non-statutory advocacy services. Without secure core funding there will be no voluntary / third sector organisations to liaise with and / or signpost to”.

“There are still many gaps in eligibility for services based on current funding”.

“Funding is needed for general advocacy”.

“We have noticed that the casework carried out by our advocates has become more complex which is putting more pressure on our services. This has a knock-on effect that the advocates are unable to take on as many cases due to the complexity of the cases they are working on, this is leading to more stress, more sick leave which then puts more pressure on advocates that are in work. Due to the lack of increase in funding, we are struggling to increase wages with staff then leaving. It has become a vicious circle”.



<sup>1</sup>Advocacy Services in Wales - [www.agecymru.org.uk/advocacyservicesinwales](http://www.agecymru.org.uk/advocacyservicesinwales)



## Impact of the cost-of-living crisis

During the period since Advocacy Counts 8 was published in 2022, Wales has been experiencing a cost-of-living crisis. Discussions during regional advocacy network meetings had indicated a significant impact on clients, advocates and services. An additional question was therefore included in the Advocacy Counts 9 survey which asked organisations what impact, if any, had the cost-of-living crisis had on their services.

Comments were received to this question from almost all the organisations who completed the survey. All the comments related to increasingly challenging circumstances for all involved in advocacy. Many reported increased needs for advocacy and that cases were becoming more complex, had multiple issues beyond the initial referral, with clients requiring greater levels of advocacy support over a longer period of time. A reduction in the range and number of other support services to signpost people to for support was mentioned, along with the related challenge of clients with little or no alternative options hoping that advocates would be able to support them with issues that went beyond the bounds of advocacy.

Many advocacy services commented that they had been receiving little or no uplift in funding from commissioners and where contracts had been re-commissioned, the budgets had often remained standstill or been reduced. With inflation high over the past two years, the impact of these real terms reductions was reported as being that services had been finding it increasingly difficult to meet their financial commitments, including being able to offer increases to the salaries of their advocates. With advocacy salaries already deemed by many to be lower than those of similarly skilled and qualified professions, the lack of increases in advocates salaries was reported as having widened this gap, leading to increased financial challenges for the advocates themselves and increased challenges for services to retain and recruit advocates.

### A sample of the comments made by services include:

“More clients with more issues that don’t come under advocacy. We are having to signpost however community advocacy is needed”.

“Organisations need more funding, flexible funding and additional support in order to provide staff with salary increases in line with cost of living. We’ve also seen an increase in referrals with individuals needing advocacy support due to increased stress levels due to financial issues”.

“Funding is uncertain and not sustainable and the one-year funding without any knowledge until the last minute if we’re getting more funding is impacting heavily on the service, the staff and our clients”.

“As we haven’t had any uplift in our contract money, we are struggling to give pay raises that match the rise in inflation. We are therefore losing staff to other services, especially in the statutory sector, who can offer better paid positions”.

“Advocates salaries haven’t increased in line with inflation or with other qualified, paid roles which is a result of no or minimal increase in funding for the service. This makes it difficult to recruit”.



## Language

In providing advocacy services to ensure citizens' voices are heard and their wishes respected, it is necessary to offer support in the medium with which they are most comfortable whether that is English or Welsh.

The percentage of organisations with Welsh speaking advocates has reduced slightly from 60% to 57% since Advocacy Counts 8. The actual number of Welsh speaking advocates has also fallen from 52 to 45.

The uptake of advocacy support through the medium of Welsh continues to be low, however, there has been a slight increase. Previously, 90% of services reported that less than 10% or none of their support was provided in Welsh. This figure is now 80%. Four organisations report a more significant amount of Welsh being used with one reporting that Welsh was used in 31-40% of their casework.

## Quality and standards

In 2022, 63% of respondents had the Quality Performance Mark (QPM). In 2024 this figure has fallen slightly to 57%, with very few organisations actively working towards achieving the QPM. Overall, the percentage of organisations who don't have the QPM and aren't working towards it has remained at around 33%.

The proportion of organisations whose staff now have the City and Guild's National Advocacy Qualification or are working towards achieving it has remained at just over 80%. The number of organisations who also have advocates that either have or are working towards the BA in Advocacy qualification has fallen from three to one. Overall, this means there are four organisations who don't have advocates with a formal qualification.

When asked about training needs, Liberty Protection Safeguards; Advocacy Dilemmas; Having Difficult Conversations; Case Note Writing and Recording and Mental Capacity, Financial Safeguarding and Court of Protection were mentioned.



## Conclusions and recommendations

**Advocacy Counts 9 provides an updated snapshot of advocacy provision in Wales for adults, with a particular emphasis on older people. The numbers of people supported, paid advocates and services funded to deliver advocacy across Wales have all decreased since the last survey was reported in 2022.**

The only areas where increases have been reported were in the number of advocacy services specifically for older people and in the number of volunteer advocates working in a variety of advocacy services across Wales.

The comments submitted to the Advocacy Counts 9 questions, along with follow-up interviews with respondents and discussions at advocacy network meetings across Wales suggest that many of the reductions in service are because of real terms funding reductions. These reductions are reported to have resulted from the lack of Welsh Government funding for commissioning IPA, in contrast to the funding provided to commission the other statutory forms of advocacy, and restrictions to the budgets offered by statutory commissioners. Often, funding is uncertain and short-term, with one year funding extensions offered at the last minute.

As anticipated during previous Advocacy Counts surveys, the fulfillment of statutory requirements for advocacy commissioning seems to have diverted funding away from other forms of lower level, preventative, community-based advocacy resulting in a reduced range of these services and some organisations ceasing to exist or offer advocacy. The recommissioning of some forms of statutory advocacy has also culminated in a smaller number of organisations delivering these services, resulting in at least one large advocacy organisation ceasing to exist from 2022.



The transition from seven separate regional Community Health Councils to Llais, which covers the whole of Wales as a single organisation, has also impacted on the number of organisations and services reported in the survey.

With the cost-of-living crisis impacting on many people across Wales, the increases in the numbers and complexity of referrals have put more pressure on advocacy services at a time when the majority have reduced finances, services and advocates. To compound this, as the cases have become more complex and time consuming, advocates have been unable to support as many cases at any one time, resulting in fewer people being able to be supported and many organisations implementing waiting lists for the first time. The reduction in the range and number of other support

**Without extended, secured, sustainable longer-term funding, all the challenges highlighted by this survey will continue to escalate putting ever great pressure on advocacy organisations and advocates.**

services to signpost people to for support has resulted in people looking for advocates to support them with issues that go beyond the bounds of advocacy. All of this has resulted in the "vicious circle" scenario mentioned by one respondent and quoted earlier in this report.

Follow-up interviews with respondents and discussions at advocacy network meetings across Wales have also identified that since 2022, there has been a significant and exponential increase in the number of adult advocacy cases where advocates have been required to support the parents of children who are the subject of child protection proceedings. These cases are complex and disproportionately time-consuming compared to other cases, with cases often requiring advocates to attend court proceedings for days at a time and therefore unable to support other clients during that period. In the majority of cases, no additional funding has been allocated for support that wasn't anticipated at the time of commissioning. Without additional finances to enable additional advocates to support clients with other support needs, the overall number of people supported has reduced and the waiting lists have increased.

The cost-of-living crisis and high levels of inflation have also impacted personally on many advocates. These challenges have been exacerbated by the lack of increases in advocates' salaries, which are generally perceived to be lower than those of similarly skilled and qualified professions. The increased complexity of casework has put more pressure on

advocates, leading to more stress, more sick leave which then puts more pressure on advocates that are in work. For many organisations it has therefore become increasingly challenging to retain and recruit advocates.

Very few organisations report being able to recruit qualified advocates, with most having to support trainee advocates to complete the advocacy qualification whilst undertaking a reduced caseload. The recently restructured advocacy qualification takes longer to complete than the previous version, resulting in an extended delay before new advocates can take on a full caseload and acquire the knowledge and experience to undertake more complex cases.

Follow-up interviews and discussions with advocacy providers suggest that there continues to be little progress in extending the understanding and awareness of advocacy to potential service users or to professionals working in statutory bodies. Indeed, reduced budgets within statutory bodies have often resulted in a greater turnover of professionals than experienced previously, resulting in key contacts disappearing and an overall reduction in awareness of advocacy services and the requirements for advocacy support. More training and information continue to be required by social workers and health professionals who work directly with potential beneficiaries of advocacy services.

Without extended, secured, sustainable longer-term funding, all the challenges highlighted by this survey will continue to escalate putting ever great pressure on advocacy organisations and advocates.

Despite these challenges advocates across Wales continue to strive to offer the best support possible to people seeking help to understand their rights and have their voices heard.

Age Cymru is pleased to note the increase in the number of specialist advocacy services for older people, whilst concerned at the lower number of organisations and paid advocates specifically supporting older people. The overall reductions in wider support that older people could access is also concerning, resulting in fewer opportunities for older people to access advocacy services focusing on early intervention, prevention, and community-based advocacy.

Age Cymru remains committed to supporting the development of the independent advocacy sector in Wales and views it as a vital tool to secure the well-being of all citizens, not just that of older people. This has been demonstrated through Age Cymru securing funding to delivery advocacy directly to older people, support the wider advocacy sector and offer training opportunities across the whole advocacy sector. The HOPE project continues to ensure low level, volunteer delivered, community-based advocacy is available for older people and their carers in all areas of Wales. The Dementia Advocacy project ensures specialist support is available for older people across Wales. Age Cymru also continues to promote and make available the support and resources developed for the advocacy sector in Wales during GTAP.

For further information, please contact Age Cymru by emailing [advocacy@agecymru.org.uk](mailto:advocacy@agecymru.org.uk)

**Please note:**

The Advocacy Counts survey respondents are self-selecting. Responses are based on whether they provide funded advocacy services that are specifically for or include older people as part of their client group. While we endeavour to collect data from all providers, completion of the survey isn't mandatory.

The data which we collected was longitudinal, and therefore mirrored the other surveys in our series but we have extracted data to paint the fullest picture of advocacy services in Wales, making the data useful to commissioners, providers, and citizens alike.

**Age Cymru remains committed to supporting the development of the independent advocacy sector in Wales and views it as a vital tool to secure the well-being of all citizens, not just that of older people.**

# 3. Developments in advocacy in Wales

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**In contrast to previous Advocacy Counts reports, there have been very few significant legislative developments impacting on advocacy in Wales over the past two years. There are very few new legislative changes due to impact on advocacy in the near future that the advocacy sector are aware of.**

Previous reports have highlighted the introduction and implementation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014; the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016; Advocacy During Coronavirus; the planned change from Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards to Liberty Protection Safeguards; planned changes to the Community Health Councils and complaints advocacy; the new qualifications framework and new advocacy qualification and Changes to the Mental Health Act amongst others.

The planned change from Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards to Liberty Protection Safeguards has been delayed, with no amended timescale circulated. The Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016 has been applied to statutory providers of children's advocacy, but no announcement has been made about any plans to extend this to the adult advocacy sector.

Since Advocacy Counts 8, Community Health Councils have become Citizen Voice Bodies and the complaints advocacy services they provide have extended to include social services complaints in addition to health complaints. These extended advocacy services, known as Llais, are still becoming established at the time of writing with much remains still to be resolved around their involvement in social services complaints advocacy and the potential overlap with the commissioned IPA services.

Covid-19 continues to have some impact on advocacy services with hospital wards and care homes sometimes imposing restrictions. However, the main impacts and developments in advocacy in Wales since 2022 have been because of the issues detailed previously in this report due to the cost-of-living crisis, the continued lack of Welsh Government funding for commissioning IPA, the restrictions to the budgets offered by statutory commissioners and the fulfilment of statutory requirements diverting funding away from other forms of lower level, preventative, community-based advocacy.



# 4. Acknowledgements

Age Cymru is grateful to all the advocacy service providers who took time to complete the online survey and to those who agreed to be contacted in order to get some more detailed responses to some of the issues raised.

We'd also like to thank everyone who assisted in preparing the survey to go live and in the production of the report.

## For further information, please contact:

Louise Hughes  
Head of Safeguarding and Advocacy  
Age Cymru  
St Andrews Park  
Queen's Lane  
Bromfield Industrial Park  
Mold  
Flintshire  
CH7 1XB  
07931 904734  
advocacy@agecymru.org.uk

## Or for general enquiries:

Age Cymru  
Ground Floor  
Mariners House  
Trident Court  
East Moors Road  
Cardiff  
CF24 5TD  
029 2043 1555  
enquiries@agecymru.org.uk



Ariennir gan  
**Lywodraeth Cymru**  
Funded by  
**Welsh Government**



Age Cymru, Ground Floor, Mariners House, Trident Court,  
East Moors Road, Cardiff CF24 5TD

Tel: 029 2043 1555 Fax: 029 2047 1418

E-mail: [enquiries@agecymru.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@agecymru.org.uk) [www.agecymru.org.uk](http://www.agecymru.org.uk)

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