



Complete Agenda

Democratic Services
Swyddfa'r Cyngor
CAERNARFON
Gwynedd
LL55 1SH



Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

This document is also available in Welsh.

Meeting

GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

Date and Time

10.00 am, THURSDAY, 15TH JANUARY, 2026

Location

Virtual Meeting

*** NOTE ***

*** For public access to the meeting, please contact us***

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(DISTRIBUTED 08/01/26)

GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

MEMBERSHIP (18)

Plaid Cymru (8)

Councillors

Geraint Wyn Parry
Arwyn Herald Roberts
Meryl Roberts

Ioan Thomas
Menna Baines
Huw Rowlands

Edgar Wyn Owen
Elfed Wyn ap Elwyn

Independent (4)

Councillors

Wendy Cleaver
Richard Glyn Roberts

Angela Russell
Elwyn Jones

Lay Members (6)

Elwyn Rhys Parry
Carys Edwards
Hywel Eifion Jones
Peter Barnes
Paul Millar Mills
Dewi Lewis

Ex-officio Members

Chair and Vice-Chair of the Council

A G E N D A

1. APOLOGIES

To receive apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

To receive any declaration of personal interest.

3. URGENT ITEMS

To note any items which are urgent business in the opinion of the Chairman so they may be considered.

4. MINUTES

5 - 16

The Chairman shall propose that the minutes of the meeting of this committee, held on 13th November 2025, be signed as a true record.

5. IMPLEMENTING THE DECISIONS OF THE COMMITTEE

17 - 21

To consider the report and offer comments

6. RESPONSE PLAN TO THE OUR BRAVERY BROUGHT JUSTICE REPORT 22 - 193

To consider the report

7. REVENUE BUDGET 2025/26 – END OF NOVEMBER 2025 194 - 223 REVIEW

To receive the information, consider the risks arising from the forecast expenditure against the budget, and scrutinise the decisions to be presented to Cabinet regarding budget management by the Council and its departments

8. CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2025/26 – END OF NOVEMBER 2025 224 - 238 REVIEW

To receive the information, consider the risks regarding the Capital Programme, and scrutinise the decisions for the Cabinet

9. SAVINGS OVERVIEW: PROGRESS REPORT ON REALISING SAVINGS SCHEMES 239 - 248

To note the position and the relevant risks regarding the Savings Overview, consider the decisions for the Cabinet and comment as necessary.

**10. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION POLICY UNDER SECTION 13A(1)(C) 249 - 276
OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE ACT 1992**

To identify the relevant position and risks in relation to the content of the Policy, consider the Cabinet's decision and comment as necessary.

11. AUDIT WALES REPORTS 277 - 319

To provide an update to the Committee on reports recently published by Audit Wales

- Temporary accommodation, long-term crisis?

12. THE COMMITTEE'S FORWARD PROGRAMME 320 - 322

To consider the work programme

GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE 13 November 2025

Attendance: Chair: Carys Edwards
Vice-chair: Rhys Parry

Councillors: Elwyn Jones, Edgar Wyn Owen, Richard Glyn Roberts, Huw Rowlands, Angela Russell, Ioan Thomas, Arwyn Herald Roberts, and Meryl Roberts

Lay Members: Eifion Jones, Dewi Lewis, Peter Barnes and Paul Millar-Mills

Officers: Dewi Morgan (Head of Finance), Ffion Madog Evans (Assistant Head of Finance - Accounting and Pensions), Luned Fôn (Audit Manager), Delyth Jones-Thomas (Investment Manager), Caren Rees Jones (Group Accountant - Capital and Management), David Lloyd Williams (Group Accountant), (Nel Povey (Cynllun Yfory - Finance and Accounting Professional Trainee), Dewi Wyn Jones (Council Business Support Service Manager), Eleri Jones (Senior Executive Officer) and Lowri Haf Evans (Democracy Services Officer)

Others invited: Cllr Huw Wyn Jones (Cabinet Member for Finance)

Item 6: Yvonne Thomas and Sioned Owen (Audit Wales)

Item 7: Gwion Jones (Senior Accountant) and Siwan Glyn (Audit Wales)

Item 10: Sian Pugh (Assistant Head of Finance – Sustainability and Developments) and Bleddyn Jones (Tax Manager)

Item 11: Carwyn Rees (Audit Wales)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Dafydd Meurig, Menna Baines, Elfed Wyn ap Elwyn and Wendy Cleaver.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

None to note

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note

4. MINUTES

The Chair accepted the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 9 October 2025 as a true record.

5. IMPLEMENTING THE DECISIONS OF THE COMMITTEE

A report was submitted providing an outline of how the Council's departments had responded to the decisions of the Governance and Audit Committee so that Members could be assured that their decisions were being addressed. It was noted that the report gave Members an

opportunity to consider the decision made with the intention of removing the item / decision when the action had been completed.

In accordance with a request made in a meeting in October 2025, attention was drawn to the population information of Counties used by the Government to set the settlement.

The members thanked the officer for the report

RESOLVED

- **To accept the contents of the report**

Note:

- Output of Internal Audit 09-10-25 meeting – request to more accurately reflect the Committee's concerns in response to staff breaching statutory regulations in Care Homes.
- request to include a definite date for the resubmission of reports and updates rather than stating 'in a timely manner'.

6. FINAL ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2025 AND RELEVANT AUDIT

The report was submitted by the Assistant Head of Finance - Accountancy and Pensions. Members were reminded that conditional accounts on the Gwynedd audit for 2024/25 had already been submitted to the Committee at the meeting in September where the Statement was discussed in detail, drawing attention to the main matters and relevant notes. It was reiterated that the Harbours accounts had also been submitted to the Committee in May, and it was nice to report that there were no adaptations deriving from the Audit, and therefore they did not need to be resubmitted.

It was reported that the accounts had been subject to audit by Audit Wales since the beginning of June and that an unconditional opinion was given on the accounts by the Auditors with a combination of post-audit adaptations and recommendations had been implemented.

Reference was made to four misstatements that had not been corrected, noting that they were not being considered as material, but where relevant, they would be corrected as a part of the 2025/26 accounts.

- Note 15: Property, Apparatus and Equipment:
 1. Categorisation issue, namely that an item of capital expenditure had been funded from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), wrongly categorised and treated as an addition to the balance sheet, instead of as revenue spending, funded from capital through statute. It was confirmed that the money was not being questioned.
 2. Relating to a technical matter relating to capital treatment.
 3. That an error in the Cyngor Gwynedd valuation worksheet had led to inconsistencies between the Valuer's valuation worksheets and the figures used to update the register.

These will receive due attention by the 2025-26 accounts.

- Note 21: Creditors - matter relating to the grant balance treatment and to be corrected for the 2025-26 accounts.
- Note 17a Financial Instruments and Note 35 IFRS 16 Leases - matters associated with each other where the new requirement on councils in 2024/25 related to leasing.

This was the first year in terms of accounting treatment for leases, and therefore the matters to be addressed for the 2025-2026 accounts.

When discussing adjustments to the Statements of Accounts that have changed, attention was drawn to:

- Note 19 - Cash and Cash Equivalents and the categorisation on 31 March, which related to the payment instruction to the bank on the last day of the year and its treatment. As noted in the Auditor's report, the CIPFA guidelines are restricted for this specific scenario and the change has affected the balance sheet and the cash flow statement.
- Note 21 - Creditors. Attention was drawn to the change in creditor categorisation between the long-term and short-term for 2024/25 and the previous year, as well as correcting the creditor mis-classification in Debtors and added wording in Note 18a Debtors.
- Note 35 IFRS 16 Leases - due to new requirements relating to leasing, the format has been adapted to comply with all CIPFA requirements.
- Note 38 Pension Costs - note simplified as well as improved clarity on the Related Parties note.

It was reiterated that the adjustments did not affect the Income and Expenditure Statement or the Movement in Reserves Statement, and in the context of the balance sheet, adjustments between different headings on the Balance Sheet which had been implemented instead of changing the bottom line. Nevertheless, it was noted that the cash flow statement had been adjusted.

Yvonne Thomas, Sioned Owen and Siwan Glyn from Audit Wales were welcomed to the meeting to submit their report on the Audit of Accounts. It was noted that Audit Wales intended to publish an unqualified audit opinion on the 2024/25 accounts, reiterating that the accounts provide an accurate and fair picture of the situation and comply with appropriate practices. It was reiterated that the action steps had now been completed and there were no additional matters. Although there were no complete assurances, it was noted that the Auditors work on a material assurance level with a 2024/25 relevance level of £6.385 million and had been implemented independently over the audit period. Cyngor Gwynedd Finance Officers were thanked for their support and for the good cooperation during the process.

Attention was drawn to the new format of the report and the key summary, which was easier for the reader to understand, as well as the results of the audited risks. It was noted, due to the number of misstatements and further enquiries, that this would affect the final fee. It was highlighted that Audit Wales had set an ambition of adjusting the timetable for completing account audits by September 2026. It was acknowledged that the timetable was ambitious but that discussions had been held with Local Authorities to ensure that this was achievable - it was reiterated that this was the timetable in place before Covid-19.

Thanks were expressed for the reports.

The Council's Finance Officers were congratulated on preparing all the information and for Audit Wales for their support. The work was of a high standard and the accounts were seen to provide a 'clear and fair picture', which reflected that.

Matters arising from the ensuing discussion:

- In line with the projections, the intention was to use reserves, but now it was seen that there was a net increase of £9.0m in the funds / reserves. Good news, but were these details available when setting the tax or had a better settlement figure been received?

- It was accepted that setting a budget from projections was difficult, but there was a need to ensure that the public and the Councillors obtained a clear picture of the situation, particularly when consulting on setting the Council tax.
- An increase of £4m in the Highways reserves? Was this projected?

In response to the observations, Members were reminded that this was a snapshot on one day (31/03/25) and that a number of late grants had been received which meant that there had been no need to use reserves. Although a substantial sum appeared in the reserve, the amount was low in comparison with previous years, and despite occasional use being made of it to close financial deficits, the fund was being continuously reviewed to see how it could be strengthened. Reference was made to a recent review from Audit Wales, where it was concluded, although there was room to formalise the Council's reserves, the Council made positive use of the administration for these reserves.

In terms of presenting information clearly and accurately to the public, the Head of Finance noted that he always sought to do so, and that he did, as best as he possibly could as the 151 Officer, sign to confirm that the accounts were accurate. He reiterated in January 2026 that further work would be done to review the reserves when setting the 26/27 budget. It was highlighted that the figures would be likely to fluctuate, but everything was being checked and balanced when setting the budget.

In response to a comment that £4m had been added to the Highways Department's reserves, it was noted that this amount was money that was received to de-trunk - transfer the responsibility for highways from the Highways Agency to the management of the relevant local authority - the road between Bontnewydd and Plas Menai after building the Caernarfon bypass. It was reiterated that this was one-off funding to maintain the highways.

In response to a comment regarding the inflation rate being highlighted as 2.75% in Note 38 - Pension Costs) although the Bank of England noted a rate of inflation of 3.8%, it was noted that Hymans Robertson (Independent Actuary Company) looked to the long-term and acted on an expected average over many years into the future.

In response to a comment regarding an increase in employer national insurance contributions and whether Cyngor Gwynedd had received grant funding or had had to submit a funding bid in order to pay, it was noted that the cost was £4.5m and that a grant of £3.9m had been received from the Welsh Government. There would be a deficit of £770k in the 2025/26 budget.

RESOLVED

- To accept and approve the 'ISA260' Report by Audit Wales in respect of Cyngor Gwynedd
- To accept and approve the Statement of Accounts 2024/25 (post-audit)
- The Chair of the Committee and the Head of Finance Department to certify the Letter of Representation electronically
- To congratulate the officers for their work of securing an unqualified statement
- To thank Audit Wales for effective collaboration

7. THE GWE JOINT COMMITTEE'S FINAL ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2025 AND RELEVANT AUDIT

Submitted – the report of the Head of Finance, Cyngor Gwynedd, asking the Committee to consider and approve the 2024/25 Statement of Accounts (post-audit), Audit Wales 'ISA260' report and the Representation Letter before authorising the Chair and Head of Finance to authorise the letter electronically.

The Assistant Head of Finance - Accounting and Pensions (Cyngor Gwynedd) explained that Cyngor Gwynedd, as the host Council, had been responsible for undertaking accounting responsibilities and reporting on the financial matters of the GwE Joint Committee. GwE was wound up on 31 May 2025, and as the Joint Committee did not meet after this date, the arrangement decided upon was for the 2024/25 accounts to be submitted to the Governance and Audit Committee for approval. It was reiterated that the accounts for April and May relevant to 2025/26 would also be submitted in due course, as the situation for the year was finalised. It was noted that the accounts had been subject to audit by Audit Wales since the end of June and that the Auditors would give an unqualified opinion on the accounts.

It was reported that there had been no change to the report's main financial statements submitted to the Auditors (the Balance Sheet, Income and Expenditure Statement, Cash Flow Statement or the Movement in Reserves Statement), but there were a few adjustments to the notes supporting the Statement:

- Note 17b 'Payments to Officers' - that there was an adjustment to the figures for two officers.
- Note 22 Pension Costs - note simplified and shows the Net Pension figures only to facilitate the reader.
- Note 16 'Cash Flow Statement' - attention was drawn to a category adjustment, although there was no change to the note's bottom line.

In addition, there were a small number of minor narrative adjustments to some of the notes.

On behalf of Audit Wales, Siwan Glyn noted that Audit Wales intended to publish an unqualified opinion on the 2024/25 accounts, reiterating that the accounts provided an accurate and fair picture of the situation, complied with appropriate practices and that Audit Wales worked for a level of 'relevance'. It was reported that the level of relevance was determined to try and acknowledge and correct misstatements that could otherwise mislead those who used the accounts. A relevance level of £199,000 was determined for the 2024/25 audit and threshold misstatements above £10,000 was reported (calculated as 5% relevance). Attention was drawn to a list of the auditor's risks which highlighted how they were addressed as part of the audit. It was reported that no audit risks were found.

In the context of ethical compliance, it was noted that Audit Wales had remained independent, and the Cyngor Gwynedd Finance Team was thanked for their support.

The report was welcomed, and everyone was thanked for their work.

RESOLVED

- **To accept and approve the 'ISA260' Report by Audit Wales in respect of Cyngor Gwynedd**
- **To accept and approve the GwE Statement of Accounts 2024/25 (post-audit)**

8. REVENUE BUDGET 2025/26 – END OF AUGUST 2025 REVIEW

A report was submitted by the Cabinet Member for Finance asking the committee to scrutinise the situation and relevant risks in relation to the Council's budgets and its departments. It was explained that the report detailed the latest review of the Council's revenue budget for 2025/26, and the projections towards the end of the financial year.

Following the end of August review, it was noted that the projections suggested an overspend of £6.3 million by Council departments, with 75% of it in the adults and children care field. It was explained, following on from a trend in previous years, that there was a substantial overspend in the waste, highways and municipal field also, but an underspend on corporate budgets, which means that this reduces the overspend projections as a whole to £2.5 million.

Attention was drawn to the main issues:

- Adults, Health and Well-being Department - latest projections suggest that if there are no changes in the actions during the year, there will be a financial deficit of £3.1, by the end of the year. £3 million worth of permanent funding was allocated to the field for 2025/26, but a £1 million worth of savings and cuts had not been achieved to date.

In the context of older people services, an increase was seen in the demand for older people residential care and an unexpected and unusual increase for residential care due to mental health issues; the pressure on the domiciliary care provision also continued.

- Children and Families Department - project a budgetary deficit of £1.5 million, after giving over £2 million in bids to the department for 2025/26. The main fields facing pressures are out-of-county placement, and the provision for children with disabilities in the Derwen and Hafan y Sêr service.
- Byw'n lach – over the past few years, Byw'n lach has received annual financial support from the Council above the contracted payment of the provider contract, to enable them to sustain their services. It was reported that the financial support continued this year, and the required sum was £219k.
- Highways, Engineering and YGC Department - a financial deficit of £522k is projected, a reduction was seen in the work being commissioned from external agencies which consequently has a negative income on highways services. In the Municipal Unit, a combination of factors is seen, which includes added pressures on street cleaning and public toilet cleaning staff; income losses are issues in land maintenance and public toilets.
- Environment Department - a budgetary deficit of £740k is projected, with an annual trend of overspend in the waste collection and recycling field continuing and responsible for £662k of the overspend.

Attention was drawn to considerations on how to fund the costs of safeguarding the Corbett Arms Hotel building in Tywyn (Grade II listed building), which has been a cause for concern for Cyngor Gwynedd and the local community for years as it is in a dangerous structural condition. This meant that the Council had had to act to safeguard and protect the public and the potential final cost could be somewhere between £1m and £1.5m. A report would be submitted in due course to consider the options to meet the cost.

- Housing and Property - a trend of substantial pressures on the emergency accommodation service continued, with expenditure projections of £6.7 million in the field this year, compared with £6 million last year. The financial situation included an additional budget of £3m which had been allocated from the council tax premium and an additional one-off budget allocated as a part of the bids process to assist with the added pressures. It is anticipated that the department as a whole will overspend by £167k.
- Corporate - an underspend of £3.8 million on several corporate headings.

The members expressed their thanks for the report:

During the ensuing discussion, the following observations were made by members:

- That there was an increase in the use of private homes as in-house residential care services were facing staffing challenges - was this an example where delivering savings had failed?
- Accepted that the increasing demand on social services led to an overspend, but what were the reasons of the Highways Department and Environment Department? If there was a suggestion to restructure these departments in response, a formal timeframe for the work was needed so that the budget could be better reviewed.
- That the situation was challenging and changed continuously - and increasing demand created new situations.
- The situation needed to be monitored.

In response to a question on the latest situation with the Corbett Arms Hotel in Tywyn, the Head of Finance noted that the situation was complex as the Council did not own the hotel. The building owner was responsible for ensuring that the building was maintained to the required standard, but despite efforts to contact the owner, the Council, due to the statutory duty to protect public health and safety, had to step in to safeguard the Grade II listed building, which had continued to deteriorate and now it was in a dangerous structural condition. It was noted that this was expensive and that discussions would be held to consider the potential options to meet the cost.

RESOLVED

- **To accept the report on the end of August 2025 review of the Revenue Budget**
- **To note the latest financial position regarding the budgets of each department / service.**

Note:

Request for a timetable for the arrangements to restructure the Highways Department and the Environment Department (by January 2026 meeting).

9. TREASURY MANAGEMENT 2025-26 MID YEAR REVIEW

A report was submitted by the Investment Manager, reporting on the actual results of the Council's treasury management for 2025/26 up to 30 September 2025, against the 2025/26 Treasury Management Strategy approved by the Full Council in March 2025. It was noted that the strategy asked the Investment Manager to report on prudent treasury management indicators every quarter to the Committee.

It was reported that the period had been a very busy one for the Council's treasury management activity and that the position on 31 March 2025 was very strong with the Council in a net investment position of £53m because of the high level of investments and operational capital. This included the North Wales Ambition Board funding.

It was highlighted, during the period, that there was a change to the Council's borrowing level, after repaying a historical loan. It was explained that the loan of £16.2m with Barclays had a maturing date of 2074, but that an offer had been received to repay it early on very favourable terms, which saved long-term interest costs for the Council. Reference was made to other loans held by the Council with the Public Works Loan Board, but there were no advantages from repaying these early at present.

Attention was drawn to treasury investment activity, noting that the Council continued to invest in banks and building societies, local authorities, money market funds, debt

management office and pooled funds and that these were consistent with the type of investments made by the Council for many years now and that the risk metrics and earnings were consistent with other authorities.

It was noted that all activities had fully complied with the CIPFA code of practice and the Council's Treasury Management which was good news and evidenced firm control over the finances. In the period in question, investments were made at a higher level than the approved level for the banks and money market funds, because the Council had a high level of money, and options were scarce. It was reiterated that steps had been taken to ensure that this would not happen in the future by opening more accounts to spread out the money.

Attention was drawn to the Liability Benchmark, noting that it was an important tool to establish whether the Council was likely to be a long-term external borrower, and therefore shaped the strategic focus and refined decision-making. It was indicated that the Council expected to remain above its benchmark up to 2027 because the Council held reserves, and the cash flow to date had been below the assumptions made when the money had been borrowed. It was also noted that there was no need to borrow in the longer term, based on current projections; nevertheless, it was commented that there may be a need to borrow in the short-term in the near future.

Finally, reference was made to the prudential indicators, and it was reported that there was also full compliance here.

The members thanked the officer for the report.

RESOLVED

To accept the report for information

10. COUNCIL TAX COLLECTION RATES

In response to a request from the Chair, a joint report was submitted by the Head of Finance and the Assistant Head of Finance - Sustainability and Developments, outlining the length and size of the debt from tax collection and how the Council was operating to address the situation. It was explained that Council Tax collection rates (within the year) in Gwynedd were the lowest in Wales in 2024/25, with 92.9% of the debts collected by the end of the financial year - which equated to £8.2 million in owed taxes.

Reference was made to the collection rates on the different types of accounts for 2024/25 as well as the value of the uncollected debts per category. It appears from the data that the premium on second homes and empty properties affected general collection rates, with the debts on accounts including the premium as well as the basic tax at £3.9m (£3.1m on second homes and £0.8m on empty properties) and the debts on basic Council Tax accounts only, was £4.3m. It was noted that there was a collection rate of 95.09% on the accounts with basic Council Tax only, which was 2.16% higher than the average of 92.93% across all categories.

It was highlighted that administering the Premium also placed serious pressures on the ability of the Taxation Service to achieve its work, representing a huge proportion of the enquiries that the service had to deal with, along with weaknesses in the Service which had contributed to the decline in the collection rate, which included:-

- E-mail backlog.
- Delay in sending reminders during the year.
- Delay before cases were transferred to the enforcement company.
- Level of resources in the Recovery Team.

It was reported that key steps had been taken and continued to be put in place to strengthen the recovery arrangements. It was noted that a detailed action plan had been prepared and staff (internal arrangements and via an experienced tax agency) had been appointed to complete the work. In addition, a detailed timetable was put in place for sending reminders in 2025/26, delegation arrangements were reviewed so that officers were available to act during the absence of key officers and recovery structures in the Finance Department were reviewed.

It was reiterated that a change in legislation, where self-catering accommodation in Wales was required to be available for 252 days and let for 182 days a year in order to be included on the non-domestic rates list, had affected the collection rates. In 2024/25, 692 properties were transferred back to Council Tax, with 558 of them returned during the second half of the year. It was noted that many of them were likely to transfer from the non-domestic rates list where taxes were not payable, to a Council Tax band where they needed to pay the basic council tax, and 150% of the Council Tax premium; they were also requests that were being back-dated (some back to April 2023) and as a result, the bills were substantial and therefore remained unpaid at the end of March 2025. In addition, by the end of September 2025, 395 further properties had transferred to a Council Tax band, compared with 134 for the same period last year. It was reiterated that the Welsh Government were conducting a consultation on the matter at present, and the outcome of the consultation could lead to further changes to the rules in the future.

In the context of the current situation, it was noted thus far in 2025/26, that 2,018 debt orders, to the value of £4.7m, had been received, with a further request to the Court on 26 November 2025, for 939 debt orders, to the value of £2.3m. The priority with the orders this year was to ensure that there was no delay before the cases were submitted to the enforcement company, in order to maximise the taxes that would be collected during the year.

Gratitude was expressed for the report and for the response to the request for information.

Matters arising from the ensuing discussion:

- Would adopting an Exemption Policy make the situation clearer than the Council Tax Reduction Policy under Section 13A(1)(c)? What is the 'propriety' of an exemption policy absence?
- No doubt regarding the use of the Council Tax Reduction Policy under Section 13A(1)(c), but what was the timetable?
- Need to consider modelling the impact of a potential exemption policy on the general performance of the Finance Department.
- What were the side-effects of the situation on sustainable tourism and town centre regeneration? The objectives of the Authority had to be coordinated.
- Should the Council have projected the situation considering the increase in the premium on second homes and empty homes?
- That there was £7m in debt here - were further steps in place to improve the situation and reduce the figure?
- That the loopholes in the arrangements for collecting the premium needed to be closed.
- Sickness and delay were insufficient reasons for failing to act. Such excuses made the Council open to criticism.
- Back-dated bills were concerning and caused worry to many. The costs were out of their reach.
- Did the Policy address the situation of holiday unit owners, who had seen a substantial increase in their tax bills as a result of increasing the lettings threshold?
- A delay from the Valuer's Office created a back-log of work.
- The policy had to be implemented effectively - they owed this to ratepayers.
- Had they considered increasing the premium on empty properties to 150%?

In response to the above observations, and to further questions, it was noted:

- regarding the service's staffing structure, staff expertise and the service's reliance on agency staff, that work had been done to plan the workforce for the future. It was explained that experienced tax agency staff had been appointed temporarily to assist with the work back-log and great benefits were seen from their experiences, not only in the tax administration field, but in the specialist fields of recovery and the use of relevant systems. Whilst accepting that they could not speak Welsh, they did not contact the public - Council staff dealt with that aspect. It was reiterated that a student had completed one piece of specific administrative work relating to correcting names, in order to release the time of specialist staff. In addition, two Assistant Recovery Officers, a Professional Trainee - Taxation and Benefits as well as a Taxation Apprentice, had been appointed.
- in terms of the propriety of the absence of an exemption policy, the Council followed clear guidance and complied with the Act and the instructions of the Valuation Office Agency. It was reported that every bill being implemented was implemented legally; that the Council Tax Reduction Policy under Section 13A(1)(c) gave powers to the Cabinet Member for Finance, Head of Finance, Assistant Head - Sustainability and Developments and the Taxation Manager, to look at and review specific cases, hardship cases and/or current bills - only the Cabinet had the powers before approving the policy; that listing 'specific matters' was seen as a risk and Members were reminded that any ratepayer could submit an appeal via a tribunal if they did not agree with the amount. That an update on the implementation of the Council Tax Reduction Policy Update under Section 13A(1)(c) would be submitted to the Committee in January 2026.
- that modelling work had been completed and whilst accepting that introducing the premium had placed serious pressures on the taxation service, the tax had been increased for a valid reason in response to the housing crisis in the County.
- regarding the number of debts being written-off and whether there were criteria to implement this, historically 98.5% to 99% were collected and around £1 million - £1.5 million had been written-off. With the tax levels likely to increase, time will tell whether this figure would also increase. In response to a supplementary question about why the issue of staff shortages was not addressed sooner, it was noted that every service had undergone efficiency savings in the hope of trying to continue the service with less. With a change in legislation, requiring self-catering accommodation in Wales to be available for 252 days and let for 182 days a year, the requirements of the service had increased significantly in a very short time
- that a delay with the Valuer's Office created a back-log of work and that assessments could take up to a year which affected the ratepayers. It was highlighted that the Valuer's Office was a part of the Inland Revenue, and the service had been split between Wales and England without a specific resource for Gwynedd - that Gwynedd's point of contact dealt with another 44 counties.
- in response to acting to improve the situation, it was noted that communicating with ratepayers was a priority for the service, which took every opportunity to encourage ratepayers to come to the Council to discuss their situation. It was reiterated that every effort was being made to provide assistance and support, and with referrals also made to CAB for further support; that three notices and a summons were in the processing steps, with the ratepayer having an opportunity at every step to discuss, along with a special arrangement before implementing the mandatory steps. When an enforcement company would be pulled into the process, the ratepayer would receive a letter in advance of the arrangements. When the enforcement procedure failed, potential options would be considered - a pay order or forcing the sale of a property (although we tried to avoid this).

In response to a supplementary question about placing pressure on owners to sell empty houses, it was noted that this would mean that houses would be sold on the open market and therefore unlikely to be bought by a local person.

- that court costs and collection fees were payable by the ratepayer.
- that the Council received a contribution towards tax collection costs. It was explained that administrating the Premium placed serious pressure on the Taxation Service's ability to achieve its work and when the premium was established, a budget of £52,600 was received to fund two posts, and additional funding of £114,750 was received in 2024/25 to fund an additional post and a post upgrade within the service following evaluation. It was reiterated that a stronger bid needed to be made so that it would be possible to collect more with more staff. In response, it was suggested whether it would be possible to use the empty homes premium and second homes premium to pay the salaries of staff who administrate the premium, instead of from the budget of the Finance Department.
- regarding the challenge from a member to differentiate in statements, that the Government's guidance noted that Local Authorities should deal with matters on their own merits, but that the Council noted that the Valuer's Office placed property in a category, that the situation was out of their hands, and if expressing 'out of their hands' was realistic, that the Council received definitive orders by the Valuer's Office and that the Council acted on that. Further clarification on this point was given, namely that the Valuer's Office would decide whether the property was a council tax property, or a business rates property and that the Council has no legal means of changing this. The Valuation Office would also set the date of the change, and the taxation service must act from that day. In the context of a council tax premium, the Council would consider whether the premium was appropriate, and if there was justification for an optional reduction in accordance with the Council Tax Reduction Policy under Section 13A(1)(c) which has been approved. In terms of the differences in the statements, this could be considered.

RESOLVED

- **To accept the report**
- **To support the work and welcome the improvements that have been made in response to the announcement that Cyngor Gwynedd's Tax Collection rates were the lowest in Wales 2024/25**
- **Accept that the 182-day lettings threshold has significantly increased the Unit's work**
- **Accept that the approval of a Council Tax Reduction Policy under Section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 by Cabinet 11-11-25 responds to situations where support is offered to residents facing exceptional financial hardship or unusual circumstances, but a request was made for further consideration as to whether the Policy addressed the situation of holiday units which had seen a substantial increase in their tax bills as a result of increasing the lettings threshold.**

Note:

- To consider the effects of the situation on sustainable tourism and town centre regeneration
- To model the impact of a potential exclusion policy on the overall performance of the Finance Department
- A suggestion to consider using the empty properties premium and second homes premium to cover the salaries of staff administering the premium, rather than from the Finance Department's budget

- Council Tax Reduction Policy Update under Section 13A(1)(c) to be submitted to the Committee in January 2026

11. NATIONAL FRAUD INITIATIVE 2024-25 UPDATE

Submitted, for information, an update from Carwyn Rees (Audit Wales) on the latest exercise of the National Fraud Initiative 2024/25 on a national and local level (as at 31-07-25). Attention was drawn to a briefing note which introduced background information about the assessment, explaining that the exercise was held every two years and was a way of preventing and finding fraud by sharing and pairing data electronically. The assessment was completed jointly between Audit Wales and Cyngor Gwynedd Internal Audit, and it was a good opportunity to share good practice, and information that would feed into the national assessment.

The members thanked the officer for the report

RESOLVED

To accept the contents of the report for information

12. THE GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE'S FORWARD PROGRAMME

Submitted - a forward programme of items for the Committee's meetings until October 2026. The Members were reminded that if they wanted to add another item to the forward work programme, for them to propose that by sending an e-mail to the Chair or Head of Finance.

RESOLVED:

- **To accept the work programme until November 2026**
- **An update should be presented on the 'Child Practice Review' *Our Bravery Brought Justice*, to the January 2026 meeting**

The meeting commenced at 10.00 and concluded at 12.40

CHAIR

Agenda Item 5

COMMITTEE	GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE
DATE	15 JANUARY 2026
TITLE	IMPLEMENTING THE DECISIONS OF THE COMMITTEE
PURPOSE OF REPORT	TO PRESENT AN UPDATE ON IMPLEMENTING THE COMMITTEE'S PREVIOUS DECISIONS
AUTHOR	DEWI MORGAN, HEAD OF FINANCE
ACTION	FOR INFORMATION

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline how Council departments have responded to the decisions of the Government and Audit Committee, so that members can receive assurance that their decisions are being addressed.
- 1.2 This contributes to reassuring members that the Council's governance is operating effectively.
- 1.3 This item is an opportunity for all members of the Governance and Audit Committee to consider the decisions made. Where the action has been completed, or where further action was not necessary, the line is removed from the table after the Committee has considered the matter.

2. DECISIONS SINCE ESTABLISHING THE NEW COUNCIL (MAY 2022)

Meeting of 5 September 2024

Item	Decision	Update
IMPLEMENTING THE DECISIONS OF THE COUNCIL	To accept the contents of the report. Note: Add to the decision notice: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• That an information session on the field of homelessness needs to be held for Committee members to better understand the field and to understand the reasons why costs in the field are so high.	No sessions have been arranged yet –Session content to be confirmed for the Housing and Property Department's officers to prepare accordingly.

Meeting of 10 October 2024

Item	Decision	Update
AUDIT WALES: URGENT AND EMERGENCY CARE: 'FLOW OUT OF HOSPITAL - NORTH WALES REGION'	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To accept the contents of the report.• Submit an update on the recommendations in 12 months' time.	A timely update is expected.

Meeting 16 January 2025

AUDIT WALES REPORTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To accept the National and Local report • To accept the Council's response to the recommendations <p>Note:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following the receipt of CIPFA support and guidance, the response Work Programme to be submitted to the Committee by March 2026 • Performance Reports to be submitted to Scrutiny Committees to demonstrate that the statutory requirements are being addressed • To correct the translations of place names in the reports 	These action points are expected to be completed in line with the adjusted action plan following the completion of the CIPFA report.
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Meeting 6 February 2025

SPECIAL AUDIT REPORT - HOME CARE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To accept and note the progress on the findings of the Internal Audit review of the Council's Home Care arrangements • The thorough Work Programme that was in place to improve the provision was welcomed. • Further updates would be required in 12 months on the progress and the success of the work programme. 	The relevant action point is expected to be completed as planned.
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Meeting 11 September 2025

CYNGOR GWYNEDD'S ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT FOR 2024/25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To accept the (draft) Annual Governance Statement • To accept the (draft) Annual Governance Statement Action Plan. • To approve the Statement, and recommend that the Council Leader and Chief Executive sign it. <p>Note:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amend the current Finance risk score from 20 to 15 in the Welsh version of the report, point 4.2 • The context of the 'culture' risk refers to the fundamental principles of Ffordd Gwynedd • Request for further information to ensure that arrangements are in place to improve services • Request for the Council Tax Collection Rates report to highlight the housing premium 	The governance risk scores will be reviewed regularly and reported to the Committee. This will include information about developments within the departments. The report on Council Tax Collection Rates was presented to the Committee on 13 November.
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Meeting 9 October 2025

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPROVEMENT PROPOSALS OF EXTERNAL AUDIT REPORTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To accept the report <p>Note: To accept the 'Flow Out of Hospital' Investigation progress report, Spring 2026</p>	This action point is expected to be completed as planned.
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THE COMMITTEE'S FORWARD PROGRAMME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To accept the Work Programme for November 2025 - October 2026 • A request for an update on the work of the Finance Department on drawing up the policy on exceptions to the Council tax premium in relation to self-catering accommodation businesses that fail to reach the 182-day letting threshold <p>Note: Remove the Recommendations and Proposals for Improvement from External Audit Reports for November as it was discussed in October 2025</p>	<p>The report on Council Tax Reduction Policy was presented to the Cabinet on 11 November 2025 and is also a separate item on this meeting's agenda.</p>
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Meeting 13 November 2025

IMPLEMENTING THE DECISIONS OF THE COMMITTEE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To accept the contents of the report <p>Note:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Output of Internal Audit 9-10-25 meeting – request to more accurately reflect the Committee's concerns in response to staff breaching statutory regulations in Care Homes • Request to include a definite date for the resubmission of reports and updates rather than stating 'in a timely manner' 	<p>Internal Audit will be in contact with the Adults, Health and Wellbeing Department as per the committee's request.</p> <p>We will review and aim to develop the format of the report over the coming months to include target/completion dates for the relevant action points.</p>
FINAL ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2025 AND RELEVANT AUDIT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To accept and approve the 'ISA260' Report by Audit Wales in respect of Cyngor Gwynedd • To accept and approve the Statement of Accounts 2024/25 (post-audit) • The Chair of the Committee and the Head of Finance to electronically certify the Letter of Representation • To congratulate the officers for their work of securing an unqualified statement • To thank Audit Wales for effective collaboration 	<p>No Further Action</p>
THE GWE JOINT COMMITTEE'S FINAL ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2025 AND RELEVANT AUDIT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To accept and approve the 'ISA260' Report by Audit Wales in respect of Cyngor Gwynedd • To accept and approve the GwE Statement of Accounts 2024/25 (post-audit) 	<p>No Further Action</p>

REVENUE BUDGET 2025/26 – END OF AUGUST 2025 REVIEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To accept the report on the end of August 2025 review of the Revenue Budget • To note the latest financial position regarding the budgets of each department / service. <p>Note: Request for a timetable for the arrangements to restructure the Highways Department and the Environment Department (by the January 2026 meeting)</p>	<p>A separate item on the November 2025 review is part of this meeting's agenda and will refer to the relevant departments' current situation. Several steps are included within the restructuring plan of both departments with an intent for some to be completed during 2025/26 and others following in 2026/27.</p>
TREASURY MANAGEMENT 2025-26 MID-YEAR REVIEW	To accept the report for information	No Further Action
COUNCIL TAX COLLECTION RATES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To accept the report • To support the work and welcome the improvements that have been made in response to the announcement that Cyngor Gwynedd's Tax Collection rates were the lowest in Wales 2024/25 • To accept that the 182-day lettings threshold has significantly increased the Unit's work • To accept that the approval of a Council Tax Reduction Policy under Section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 by the Cabinet on 11-11-25 responds to situations where support is offered to residents facing exceptional financial hardship or unusual circumstances, but a request was made for further consideration as to whether the Policy addressed the situation of the owners of holiday units who have seen significant rises in their tax bills as a result of the increase in the lettings threshold. <p>Note:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To consider the effects of the situation on sustainable tourism and town centre regeneration • To model the impact of a potential exclusion policy on the overall performance of the Finance Department • A suggestion to consider using the empty properties premium and second homes premium to cover the salaries of staff administering the premium, rather than from the Finance Department's budget • Council Tax Reduction Policy Update under Section 13A(1)(c) to be submitted to the Committee in January 2026 	<p>How to utilise the Premium during 2026/27 will be considered as part of the standard budget setting procedure.</p> <p>A report on the Council Tax Reduction Policy under section 13A(1)(c) is an item on this meeting's agenda.</p>

NATIONAL FRAUD INITIATIVE 2024-25: UPDATE	To accept the contents of the report for information	No Further Action
THE COMMITTEE'S FORWARD PROGRAMME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To accept the work programme until November 2026 • An update on the Child Practice Review '<i>Our Bravery Brought Justice</i>', to be presented at the January 2026 meeting 	An update on the Child Practice Review - '<i>Our Bravery Brought Justice</i>', is an item on this meeting's agenda.

3. RECOMMENDATION

3.1 The Governance and Audit Committee is asked to consider the contents of the tables above and to offer comments.

Agenda Item 6

MEETING	Governance and Audit Committee
DATE	15 January 2026
TITLE	Response Plan to the Our Bravery Brought Justice Report
REASON TO SCRUTINISE	Assurance as to the implementation of the Response Plan
AUTHOR	Dafydd Gibbard - Chief Executive
CABINET MEMBER	Cllr Nia Jeffreys – Council Leader Cllr Menna Trenholme – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children Cllr Dewi Jones – Cabinet Member for Education

1. Background

- 1.1 The Response to Offending Plan was adopted by Cyngor Gwynedd's Cabinet in January 2025, and has since been a live document which has evolved over time. It was recognised that the Plan would need to be fully revised following the publication of the Child Practice Review report.
- 1.2 On 4 November 2025, 'Our Bravery Brought Justice' was published and the Response Plan has been subsequently amended. This has been the most significant amendment since adopting the Plan.
- 1.3 The Committee is asked to consider the appropriateness of the process of developing the revamped Response Plan before it is submitted to Cabinet for formal adoption.
- 1.4 An extraordinary Council meeting will be held in the coming weeks, and this Committees response will be conveyed at this meeting.

2. What exactly needs scrutiny?

- 2.1 That the Plan responds appropriately and fully to the 'Our Bravery Brought Justice' Report.
- 2.2 Consider the main priorities for immediate action.
- 2.3 Advise on dealing with dependencies (e.g. waiting for regional or national recommendations) and mitigating potential risks.

3. Summary of the key matters

4. Background / Context

- 4.1 The original Response Plan was adopted by the Cabinet on 21 January 2025, with 4 key work streams:
 - Work Stream A – Supporting victims and survivors
 - Work Stream B – Ensuring we have the best possible safeguarding arrangements
 - Work Stream C – Establishing, learning and improving

- Work Stream Ch – Supporting and stabilising Ysgol Friars

4.2 A Response Board has been established to scrutinise, challenge and advise on the delivery of the Plan's content, independently chaired by Professor Sally Holland. Board Membership includes a number of external organisations as observers to challenge and monitor the progress of the Response Plan, including Estyn, CIW, Welsh Government, Children's Commissioner and the Regional Safeguarding Board. Also, representation from Ysgol Friars (Headteacher and Chair of Governors), Gwynedd's Secondary sector, Council Officers, as well as Cabinet Members from the relevant fields to set the strategic political direction of the areas of work under their responsibility, while also scrutinising the work of officers and supporting them.

4.3 The 'Our Bravery Brought Justice' report was published by the North Wales Safeguarding Board on 4 November 2025. Before, and since, work has continued to review what needs to be incorporated into the Gwynedd plan moving forward including addressing the themes and recommendations identified in the report and aligning with those already included in the response plan (which also included recommendations from other reports).

4.4 **Appendix 1** includes a copy of the revised Response Plan reflecting these changes. These have been set out under 7 main themes to align with the themes of the Our Bravery Brought Justice report:

- Voice of the Child and Supporting Victims
- Managing Allegations and Concerns About Adults Working with Children
- Training and Policies
- School Governance
- Restrictive Practices
- Crisis Planning and Crisis Response
- Ysgol Friars

4.5 An easy-read version of the Response Plan is currently being developed. This version will be presented at the same time as the full Response Plan it is presented to the Cabinet.

4.6 A detailed work programme is presented to the Response Board meetings and as this has now grown in size an overview report is also presented for each of the 7 individual themes, including an update on what has been achieved since the previous Board meeting and setting out what will be prioritised for the next period. See the theme progress reports at **Appendix 2** for information.

4.7 Attached to the progress reports for the 7 themes, a detailed Work Programme is presented to Response Board Members to give them the opportunity to challenge the detail. This work programme includes recommendations and actions from the Our Bravery Brought Justice report, the original Response Plan and other additional actions that have been identified. A copy of the work programme is shared for information at **Appendix 3**.

- 4.8 See in Appendix 3 that the high-level work tasks are listed (white lines) and there is a series of subtasks (yellow lines) for each work task which ensures the level of detail required at an operational level. This level of detail is presented to the Response Board to scrutinise as well as to give consideration to the theme reports.
- 4.9 Work tasks that have been completed and replaced or combined with the recommendations of Our Bravery Brought Justice have also been included in the Work Plan for completeness.
- 4.10 To ensure and track progress effectively, a set of clear performance measures is being applied across each of the seven themes of the Response Plan. These measures include quantitative indicators (such as receiving training, and compliance checks) and qualitative assessments (such as feedback from youth forums, parent and staff surveys and Estyn and CIW inspections). Regular monitoring against these measures will allow the Response Board to identify areas of success and those that need additional focus, ensuring that improvements are sustained and aligned with safeguarding priorities.
- 4.11 As Our Bravery Brought Justice has now been published, the Response Board documents will be shared on the website going forward.

4.12 Consultation

- 4.13 Extensive consultation was carried out in the development of the Response Plan in order to receive input from several directions including
 - Chair of the child practice review
 - Children's Commissioner
 - Estyn
 - Care Inspectorate Wales
 - RASASC
 - Welsh Government
 - Cabinet Members
 - Cyngor Gwynedd Officers

5. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

*Have you **involved** residents / service users? If not, when and how do you intend to consult them?*

- 5.1 A wide range of agencies are members or independent observers from national statutory organisations on the Response Board which is valuable in terms of receiving input and expertise from different sectors.

- 5.2 Representatives of service users have been consulted such as representatives of the schools sector in Gwynedd.
- 5.3 In addition, as requested by the Leader at the Cabinet meeting on 11 November 2025, the Independent Chair of the Response Board is currently considering the most appropriate approach to include the voice of victims in the work.

*Have you considered **collaboration**?*

- 5.4 Collaboration is vital to the success of this Plan and through the Response Board we work collaboratively with all the agencies involved in it. The Board meets regularly every other month and there is regular contact between us. Collaboration with all these agencies, as well as others such as the Police, Health Service and other Local Authorities will be key to the success of our Response Plan.

*What has been done or will be done to **prevent** problems from arising or worsening in the future?*

- 5.5 The Response Plan was developed in the first instance to do everything within our ability so that no one suffers in the same way again. The Plan includes proactive measures such as ongoing monitoring, regular reviews, staff training, and collaboration with partners to identify risks early, to prevent problems from arising or worsening in the future.

*How have you considered the **long-term** and what people's needs will be in years to come?*

- 5.6 In the new Response Plan, we have considered the long-term by establishing a multi-year work programme that strengthens the seven streams (e.g. the voice of the child, training and policies, school governance, and crisis planning and response) and ensures ongoing review, so that people's needs in the years to come – such as ongoing support for victims, trauma-informed services, 'easy to understand' versions for children, and robust safeguarding infrastructure that adapts as risks change – are met sustainably.

*To ensure **integration**, have you considered the potential impact on other public bodies?*

- 5.7 A large number of the recommendations of the 'Our Bravery Brought Justice' report are regional and national, or for all Local Authorities. We have already stated our willingness to take action before any change at a regional or national level and our desire to be working with other bodies such as the Welsh Government to pilot a new plan or guidance if desired.

6. Impact on Equality Characteristics, the Welsh Language and the Socio-Economic Duty

- 6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed in draft form and will be submitted when the Cabinet considers the Response Plan.

7. Next Steps

- 7.1 The new Response Plan is scheduled to be submitted to Cabinet for formal approval in March.
- 7.2 The Response Board will continue to meet until all the response plan actions are embedded or addressed within the Authority's performance challenge regime and the Board members are satisfied that evidence in relation to the impact measures listed demonstrates the effectiveness of these actions.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Response Plan: Our Bravery Brought Justice

Appendix 2 – Overview reports of the 7 work streams

Appendix 3 – Response Plan work programme

Appendix 4 – 'Our Bravery Brought Justice' - www.northwalesafeguardingboard.wales/gwynedd-child-practice-review

Our Bravery Brought Justice- Cyngor Gwynedd Response Plan

"We cannot for a second forget about the most important people in all of this, the children who should have been safe in their school. The whole purpose of every step that we take is to do everything possible to ensure that nobody will suffer in the same way ever again and this should be our main consideration at all times."



December 2024

Version 2. November 2025

Contents

1. Summary of the background
2. A statement of the Council's position
3. Child Practice Review - November 2025
4. Objectives of this Response Plan
5. How do we intend to fulfil our objectives?
6. Response to Offending Plan Work Streams
 - Work Stream 1 - Voice of the child and supporting victims
 - Work Stream 2 - Managing allegations and concerns about adults working with children
 - Work Stream 3 - Training and Policies
 - Work Stream 4 - School Governance
 - Work Stream 5 - Restrictive Practices
 - Work Stream 6 - Crisis Planning and Crisis Response
 - Work Stream 7 - Supporting and stabilising Ysgol Friars
7. Ownership and governance arrangements of the Plan
8. Communication plan

1. Summary of the background

Neil Foden, former headteacher of Ysgol Friars in Bangor, was arrested on 6 September 2023, in his workplace following a disclosure by one of the victims. He faced 19 charges, including 12 charges of sexual activity with a child and two charges of sexual activity with a child whilst he was in a position of trust. The criminal proceedings involved five girls over a period of four years.

In May 2024, after a three-week hearing at Mold Crown Court, the offender was found guilty. On 1 July 2024, he was sentenced to 17 years in prison.

Following his conviction, the North Wales Safeguarding Board established a Child Practice Review (CPR) under an Independent Chair, Jan Pickles, to establish the circumstances of the whole matter, learn lessons and prevent similar cases in future.

Between September 2023 and the court case, the investigations into the allegations against the offender took place. This was a criminal investigation led by the Police. With many historical allegations, some of the victims and survivors were now adults and therefore the enquiries about the offences were undertaken by the Police only. For the allegations where the victims and survivors were children at present, these investigations were undertaken in accordance with [Wales Safeguarding Procedures 2020](#). This included interviews and joint investigations between the Children Services and the Police.

In accordance with good practice in such investigations, it was crucial that no action was taken during the criminal investigation which may have undermined the Police's ability to investigate an offence. The investigations were undertaken during the period in accordance with [Part 3](#) and [Part 5](#) of the [Wales Safeguarding Procedures 2020](#). The Council led on the processes under [Part 5](#) of the Procedures to manage and moderate the investigation's activities.

Following the conviction by the Court, in June 2024, the North Wales Safeguarding Board stated immediately that it would open a Child Practice Review. The [North Wales Safeguarding Children Board](#) (NWSCB) is a statutory body under the [Social Services and Well-being Act \(Wales\) 2014](#) and its responsibility is to co-ordinate, monitor and challenge its partner agencies when safeguarding children in North Wales.

The objectives of the NWSCB are to:

- **PROTECT** children in its area who are being, or who are at risk of being, abused, neglected or experience other types of harm at present, and
- **PREVENT** children who are, or who are at risk of being abused, from being neglected or experiencing other types of harm.

The NWSCB notes that its function is to make "Safeguarding everybody's business". The partner agencies are the six local authorities across the region (Cyngor Gwynedd, Isle of Anglesey County Council, Conwy County Borough Council, Denbighshire Council, Flintshire Council and Wrexham County Borough Council), North Wales Police, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, the National Probation Service and the Community Rehabilitation Company.

The Regional Safeguarding Board appointed a Chair to lead the CPR, Jan Pickles, a very experienced individual who has been leading high-profile reviews of this nature and who has been specialising in safeguarding children matters for years (further details can be found in part 5 below). Jan Pickles

visited Council Members on 11 July 2024 in order to outline the work ahead of her and the procedure of fulfilling that work. The CPR is led, without doubt, by an experienced, specialist and passionate individual in the field and we as a Council are pleased about that.

We have benefited greatly from Jan Pickles' advice and guidance over the past months. A CPR of such a serious and complex nature as this is unfamiliar to the majority of Cyngor Gwynedd officers and Members and we are treading new ground on a daily basis. This situation is completely unprecedented; therefore, receiving the advice of a recognised expert has been invaluable.

It was originally intended for the CPR to aim to reach conclusions within approximately 6 months, which is the usual timeframe for a CPR. However, the scale of the Review has been extended considerably since then and its terms of reference are broader and more thorough. It is certainly not a usual CPR and the terms of reference place an expectation on the investigators to consider events back to 2017 (two years prior to the arrest would have been usual). This was welcomed and naturally the timeframe for completing the work has had to be extended as well. The final report, Our Bravery Brought Justice, was published in November 2025 and consequently this plan has been revised and updated in order to reflect the findings of the report.

At the time, it was considered that the CPR was initially best-placed to consider all the facts and reach meaningful conclusions. Consequently, we did not wish to hold our own review or investigation which would not be considered as good as the CPR, or which would cast any shadow over our trust in the statutory and independent process of the CPR. Consequently, the Council did not undertake its own formal reviews or investigations between June and October. Having said that, as outlined in this Response Plan, this did not prevent us from undertaking several steps to ensure that we responded appropriately to the situation.

Following discussions with the Chair of the CPR in the autumn of 2024, it was concluded that it was appropriate by then for the Council to move more swiftly with some aspects of our response rather than wait for the findings of the CPR before undertaking our own investigations, for several reasons, including:

- the change in the CPR timeframe in order to extend the scope of the work,
- the substantial work of gathering and presenting the Council's evidence to the investigators of the Review has now ended,
- new information which came to light as time went on of which we were unaware at the beginning,
- the substantial press coverage, attention on social media and the public interest in the case has led to findings which we do not know if they are correct or not.

Those Investigations and Reviews have been completed, and the various findings and recommendations stemming from these investigations and reviews have been added to our plan and the Response Board will monitor the progress of action. We have stated clearly from the beginning that we will embrace all the recommendations from every investigation and will implement them in full and without delay. In addition, further investigations will be carried out where necessary, to ensure that all aspects are thoroughly considered.

This Response Plan explains what we will do in order to try to fulfil our objectives in relation to all of this, and particularly so following the publication of the 'Our Bravery Brought Justice' report.

2. A statement of the Council's position

Before setting out our objectives, it is important that the Council states its position entirely clearly.

The offender's actions have had a deep and shocking impact on the victims, their families, the school, community, staff and Members of the Council and the entire county.

The essence of a Response Plan such as this is that it is formal in nature, as it refers to several organisational matters. However, we cannot for a second forget about the most important people in all of this, namely the children and young people who should have been safe in their school. The whole purpose of this Response Plan and every step that we take is to do everything possible to ensure that no one suffers in the same way ever again and this should be our main consideration at all times.

As a responsible public body, the Council states and recognises that the offences committed were abhorrent and devastating for all the victims and survivors. We wish to apologise to all victims and wish to guarantee that we will do our best to discover all the facts and will embrace every lesson that needs to be learned in order to improve things in the interests of future generations.

We will prioritise our resources to respond to the conclusions of all investigations that have already been completed by us as a Council and the statutory CPR. We will collaborate with the Children's Commissioner for Wales and we have invited her to offer input and advice on all our actions.

In addition to the CPR, the Council has also called on the Welsh Government to hold a Public Inquiry into all the circumstances surrounding this serious offending. It is Welsh Government that has the statutory powers to establish a Public Inquiry

We wish to leave no stone unturned, and be completely open and transparent. Otherwise, it will be impossible for us to fulfil our objectives effectively.

3. Child Practice Review Report - November 2025

As noted in the first part of this Plan, the North Wales Safeguarding Board established a Child Practice Review (CPR) immediately after the court judgement and the Council stated its full support to the Review and committed to do everything possible to support it as well as implement all the recommendations immediately. Establishing a CPR is customary in all cases where there has been abuse or neglect and a child has died or been seriously harmed.

Chair of the CPR, Jan Pickles, is an extremely experienced individual who has been leading high-profile reviews of this nature and has specialised in safeguarding children matters for many years. She is a registered social worker with extensive experience with the Probation Service, the Police and the NSPCC. She is a former Designated Safeguarding Officer at Westminster Council and is a former assistant Police Commissioner in South Wales. She was a member of the National Independent Safeguarding Board Wales for six years, until May 2022.

Amongst her recent work, Jan Pickles has led on and taken part in several high-profile investigations, including chairing the CPR into the sad case of Logan Mwangi in Bridgend. She is the author of the review into historical cases of child abuse in Winchester College and she chaired a review in a prominent school in London and worked as part of the review into historical cases (from the 1970s) of child sex abuse at Chelsea football club. She has also recently completed an independent review of historical cases of child abuse at Caldey Island monastery.

The Chair was supported by two independent investigators, Jane Foster and Anna Henderson, who are experienced in work of this nature. The investigators gathered evidence following a structured process with the initial phase focusing on meeting the victims and survivors and spending time at the School, meeting with relevant professionals and members of the public who had information they felt would support the review process.

Timelines, chronologies and analysis were submitted by 14 agencies, and the Investigators attended the School in July 2024 - nine days were spent on site to meet with over 80 members of staff and another 60 were interviewed over the course of the review.

The Review Panel has focused on key matters such as the behaviour of the offender and professional behaviour. Governance and disclosure management arrangements are also included in the scope of the review.

The following agencies were a part of the Review

- Cyngor Gwynedd
- Isle of Anglesey County Council
- Conwy County Borough Council
- North Wales Police
- Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board
- North Wales Probation Service
- North Wales Regional Safeguarding Board

All the evidence that is in the ownership of each agency was pieced together and presented to the Researchers to create a single detailed timeline of all relevant events.

In response to the developing situation, we used an external consultant to identify the cases of children and staff linked to Ysgol Friars and created an initial chronology with the intention of identifying any matter that required urgent attention. This information was submitted in its entirety to the CPR.

The Terms of Reference were reviewed regularly by the Child Practice Review Panel, to reflect any new concerns that the review identified. The final terms of reference have been published on the Regional Safeguarding Board's website ([Terms-of-reference-extended-child-practice-review-21.05.25.pdf](#)).

The North Wales Safeguarding Board provided regular updates to the Welsh Government Safeguarding and Advocacy Unit regarding the progress of the review, and the review was published in November 2025.

The Council also met with the Chair of the Panel regularly to receive updates on the process by her throughout the period of the review and two-way information sharing happens regularly and effectively.

Publication of the Child Practice Review - 'Our Bravery Brought Justice'

On 4 November 2025, two years after the arrest of the offender and eighteen months after his sentencing and starting the Review, the Child Practice Review report 'Our Bravery Brought Justice' was published. The report is very critical of several organisations, particularly so the Council and Ysgol Friars. The Review had identified a significant number of missed opportunities and raised a number of questions about the appropriateness of decisions over the years. This report proposes several recommendations, at a local and regional level, but also at a national level. The report is particularly critical of the fact that recommendations from the Clywch review (2004) had not been implemented nationally and that a great many of those recommendations have to be repeated in this CPR report.

A statement on behalf of the Council was shared publicly on the afternoon of the publication:

"The responsibility for many of the failures listed in this report lie with Cyngor Gwynedd. For this, we apologise unreservedly.

As painful as the report is to read, we welcome its contents, we accept all its finding and recommendations and promise that we will continue to put all our energy into responding, as the people of Gwynedd would expect of us.

*Two years on from the arrest, it is also a relief to be able to speak openly about this matter. Today, as we see all the pieces of this heartbreak story drawn together for the first time, our thoughts **must** turn to those who suffered, and who survived. Children who had every right to be safe at school were betrayed. Once again, we express our respect and admiration for the courage you showed in standing up to a bully and a paedophile.*

We sincerely apologise to all of you. You should not have had to suffer at the hands of a man you should have been able to trust. Your courage drives us to do better.

This report highlights the fact that opportunities were missed on far too many occasions and as one of the organisations that should have acted to prevent the offender, we failed in our response.

A school headteacher should have put the welfare and safety of children at the top of his priorities at all times. Instead, he committed serious offences against them.

This was a man who had portrayed himself as a responsible educator on a local and national level, both within the teaching unions and in the media. But he deceived school staff, the Council and other organisations, as well as the pupils and parents who had put their trust in him.

This review gives us the clearest possible understanding of what went wrong, and how we have to put things right. This report is a vital tool as we strive to improve.

Professor Sally Holland, the former Children's Commissioner for Wales, who chairs the Council's Response Board, has reported that we are making progress in implementing a number of improvements. But we still have a lot of work ahead of us, and Professor Holland, and the other institutions who are represented on our Board, will continue to provide constructive challenge in a transparent manner.

Whilst we cannot undo the pain caused, we can fulfil our responsibility to implement local improvements. But ensuring other reforms will require national change.

Over the years, we have seen recommendations made by numerous Wales and UK-wide investigations, but these have not led to change.

Hopefully, the findings of this CPR will be a watershed moment in transforming the safeguarding of children in Wales. All children must be safe – wherever they live and whichever school they attend.

We are grateful to Jan Pickles and her team for their tireless work over a twelve-month period. They have managed to go far beyond what is seen in reviews usually.

*To finish, I make no apology for returning to the most important people in all of this – the children who should have been safe at their school. The whole purpose of this report is to ensure that individuals and public organisations do everything possible to try to ensure that **nobody** suffers in the same way ever again.*

In situations where an organisation is under the spotlight, there is sometimes a tendency to be defensive. I promise today that for Cyngor Gwynedd, this will not be the case.

We will not hide from our responsibility to do whatever it takes to protect children today and into the future."

Following the publication of Our Bravery Brought Justice, this plan has been reviewed to ensure that we respond appropriately to the recommendations noted in the CPR. The intention to review the Plan following the publication of the CPR had been stated clearly from the beginning.

4. Objectives of this Response Plan

Seven main objectives have been identified for this Plan. The final objective was added by the Response Board in its first meeting.

We commit to:

1. **Acknowledge** openly and publicly that such offences should never have happened and that no child should suffer such experiences.
2. **Apologise** sincerely to the victims and survivors and their families for what they have had to suffer.
3. **Support** the victims and survivors, the school and the wider community to seek to recover their situations.
4. **Establish** all the facts of the case, the history around the situation and the wider context.
5. **Learn** all lessons identified as part of the findings and recommendations of all investigations.
6. **Improve** by responding in full and at pace to all findings and recommendations with the aim of giving confidence to the public that we are doing everything possible to ensure that nobody will suffer in the same way ever again.
7. **Be accountable** by being open and transparent about our improvement progress and commit to measure the effect of the changes that we implement.

As we go about fulfilling the above, it is crucial that we take an open and transparent approach at all times. In this respect, the Communication Plan in part 8 of this Response Plan is crucial in order to ensure that we share information clearly, consistently and in a timely manner with all relevant stakeholders.

5. How do we intend to fulfil our objectives?

In order to fulfil our objectives in full, we will focus on four work streams as shown below. It is only by taking thorough, complete and timely actions to fulfil all the objectives of this Response Plan that we can have peace of mind that we have done everything possible to ensure recovery.

Work Stream A	Support the victims and survivors	Do everything within our ability to support the victims and survivors. Establish a caring relationship with the victims and survivors
Work Stream B	Ensure we have the best possible safeguarding arrangements today so that the public has trust and confidence in them.	Ensure that our safeguarding arrangements are robust and of the best possible standard
Work Stream C	Investigate what has happened, learn and improve	Do everything possible to ensure that we fully understand everything that has happened and have identified any weaknesses. Embrace and implement the recommendations in order to learn and improve.
Work Stream Ch	Support and stabilise Ysgol Friars	Ensure that current education standards continue to be maintained, that staff are confident and that the school's Governing Body and leadership are stable, firm and effective.

Many of the initial tasks have been completed since the publication of the original plan in December 2024. Therefore, following the publication of Our Bravery Brought Justice, these work streams were revised to ensure that the report's recommendations are a part of the Response Plan. We have re-packaged all these work streams to align with the report's themes, as follows:

	Theme	Description
Work Stream 1	Voice of the Child and Supporting Victims	<p>Do everything within our ability to ensure that the voice of the child is central in relation to matters involving children, and embedded throughout all our activities.</p> <p>Do everything within our ability to support the victims and survivors and establish a caring relationship with them.</p>

Work Stream 2	Managing allegations and concerns about adults working with children	Ensure that our safeguarding arrangements are robust and of the best possible standard
Work Stream 3	Training and Policies	Ensure that training packs are appropriate and that staff have received training suitable to their roles. Do everything within our ability to ensure that the county's schools adopt and implement policies
Work Stream 4	School Governance	Offer the best possible support for our school Governors to equip them to exercise their roles.
Work Stream 5	Restrictive Practices	Do everything possible to ensure that all schools have implemented the practices and use of restrictive practices appropriately
Work Stream 6	Crisis Planning and Safeguarding Crisis Response	Ensure that the arrangements to plan and respond to crises are appropriate and that all staff know how to respond in a situation of safeguarding crisis
Work Stream 7	Support and Stabilise Ysgol Friars	Ensure that current education standards continue to be maintained, that staff are confident and that the school's Governing Body and leadership are stable, firm and effective.

Later in this Plan, we will explain the governance procedure for monitoring our progress and ensure that we take action in a timely manner. We must acknowledge clearly and openly that we have a long and challenging journey ahead to reach a situation where we would be satisfied that we have taken full and appropriate action.

6. The Plan's Work Streams

Work stream 1 – The Voice of the Child and Supporting the victims and survivors

What has been achieved thus far?

1.1 - Direct Support

Following the first disclosure on 6 September 2023, support was provided to the offender's victims in order to address their direct needs and to give them hope about the next steps. Speedy access was provided to support officers and specialist counsellors, with Police Victim and Survivor Liaison Officers leading from the first day.

The Police victim and survivor liaison officers sat on the Child Practice Review (CPR), ensuring that the voices of the victims and survivors are a core part of any discussion.

The support is ongoing with this work being monitored continuously by a regional partnership group which runs the Wales Victim Liaison Scheme, in which the Council plays a key role. The procedure is recognised nationally. Others affected have also been offered support.

Naturally, this support happens quietly in the background and is tailored specifically for the support needs of individual victims and survivors.

1.2 - Wider support in the school

The counselling services at the school were extended by collaborating with organisations such as the Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre (RASASC) North Wales, ensuring specialist support for victims and survivors and other pupils who could have been affected. Regular reviews are held to ensure that the support continues to be suitable and effective. Fortunately, Ysgol Friars collaborated with a local company to create a well-being centre on the site in 2023, as well as qualified staff, which has been beneficial as an appropriate space for recovery and emotional support.

We will continue to review the support regularly and the support is available to victims and survivors, pupils and staff. In addition, we ensure that more support is available at crucial times - for example, when there is public attention or breaking news in the press which affects individuals, including victims and the school community. Our priority is to ensure that the appropriate support is available for everyone who needs it, without delay.

1.3 - Acknowledge and Apologise

We have already acknowledged and apologised publicly for what the children and young people have suffered and part 2 of this Plan restates that formally.

However, that is only a public statement, and it is the Council's responsibility and wish to offer a personal apology to each of the victims and survivors. With the support of the Victim Liaison Scheme and the chair of the CPR, we established how to offer that personal apology.

It must be borne in mind that each of the victims and survivors has suffered and our wish in acknowledging and apologising is to offer some support towards their situation. It was essential that this work was led by the victims and survivors. We received advice and guidance from others who are more experienced in this field in doing this while being entirely careful that we did not do anything which would not be welcomed by the young girls.

Personal apologies have been made by the Council Leader and Chief Executive in the way in which each victim and survivor wanted to receive them.

1.4 - Personal Support Plan

Since the Plan was adopted in January, we have made progress in implementing a personal approach to supporting victims and survivors. Individual discussions have now been held with the majority of them to establish their specific needs, including emotional support, access to therapeutic services and practical support. Not all victims wished to accept this offer. We have established a formal process to review the support regularly, ensuring flexibility to respond to needs that change over time. In addition, additional resources have been allocated to provide specialist support for children and young people who have experienced trauma, working closely with the Children's Commissioner and external partners to ensure that the provision is comprehensive and sensitive to their experiences. We will continue to prioritise the welfare of the victims by providing the appropriate support to help them face the next steps in their lives, reflecting the lessons learned from the review and commit to continuous improvement.

What else needs to be delivered in order to meet our objectives?

1.5 - The voice of the child

We acknowledge the importance of ensuring that the voice of the child is central to our response and our day-to-day activities. Following the recommendations of Our Bravery Brought Justice, we have committed to adopting a clear policy which ensures that every child which is the subject of a part 5 review has the opportunity to express their opinion in a direct conversation with a social worker. This work is already underway, including practical methods of strengthening children's participation in decisions which affect them. We will also continue to review and extend our training for staff in order to ensure that the voice of the child principles are embedded across all services, reflecting the lessons learned from the review and responding to the national expectations.

1.6 - Wider work to ensure that children's rights are central and embedded in the Council's activities

We have re-framed our work streams to reflect the recommendations of Our Bravery Brought Justice, giving priority to ensuring that the children's rights, including the voice of the child, are central to all aspects of our activities. This includes developing one corporate "Voice of the Child" policy across all services, working with the Children's Commissioner for Wales to adopt best practices and establishing a task group with the Education Department to review and amalgamate current arrangements. In addition, we are strengthening the county youth forum to ensure representation of specific groups such as looked-after young people, Derwen children and young carers. This work will ensure that the views and experiences of children will directly influence policy, strategy and decisions, embedding the rights of the child principles in our organisational culture.

Additionally, we are working towards ensuring a "Child-Friendly County" status, collaborating with national partners to create an environment in which the rights and voice of children are respected and promoted in all fields.

1.7 - Identify and act on grooming behaviours

Since the Plan was originally adopted in January, we have strengthened our response to the risks associated with grooming by implementing several definite steps. Amended training packs have been shared with the schools, including specific guidelines on grooming behaviours and how to identify them early. We have standardised safeguarding training across different education levels in order to ensure a consistent and co-ordinate approach. In addition, the role of a Safeguarding Champion has been established to support front-line staff and increase awareness of these matters.

Further work is underway to review the content of the training packs following the publication of Our Bravery Brought Justice, including the addition of modules on sexual abuse and methods of identifying risk behaviours. Further work is to be done and we will continue to work with national partners to ensure that our approaches reflect the best standard and give priority to child safety.

1.8 - Reporting on concerns to individuals or services outside the school

All Gwynedd schools are required to display the details of the school's designated safeguarding persons including an external member of the governing body. This did not exist in the school in question at the time of the offender's arrest, but this has now changed. This is one of the matters that the Safeguarding Quality Officers check when they undertake their quality visits and is therefore monitored regularly.

Since the publication of Our Bravery Brought Justice, we have started consulting with pupils across Gwynedd schools to find the most effective methods of enabling them to contact a person or service outside the school to share concerns. Feedback to date emphasises the need for accessible, confidential and prominent options. As a result, we have agreed key principles to prominently display safeguarding services contact details and helplines in all schools, including on websites and public spaces; to provide training for staff to explain the referral routes; and develop a secure digital method to enable pupils to raise concerns directly. Consultation will continue to ensure that these arrangements reflect the needs of pupils and give priority to their voice.

1.9 - Trauma-Informed Council

Cyngor Gwynedd has committed to become a Trauma-Informed Council in order to ensure that our services respond sensitively to the effect of trauma on individuals. This means building a culture which acknowledges and responds to signs of trauma, avoiding secondary trauma and promoting welfare. We have already started on this journey by providing "Trauma-Informed" training for over 1,000 school staff, and nearly half of Gwynedd schools have trained staff members to diploma level in trauma-informed schools and communities and mental health. We are also developing a baseline assessment across Council departments to identify gaps and priorities, working with the Public Services Board to ensure a co-ordinated approach. This work will set a foundation for policies and procedures which give priority to sensitive support, reflecting the higher risks among looked-after children and ensure that our workforce have the skills and knowledge to respond appropriately.

Work stream 2 - Managing allegations and concerns about adults working with children

What has been achieved thus far?

2.1 - Corporate Safeguarding Arrangements

The Safeguarding Policy was reviewed during the second half of 2023, it was adopted by the Cabinet in February 2024 and the new version was submitted to the Full Council in March 2024. [Safeguarding Policy](#)

The Cyngor Gwynedd Corporate Safeguarding procedures focus on ensuring the safety and welfare of children and adults who are at risk of being abused or neglected. All Council employees, elected members and partners have a responsibility to create an environment in which safeguarding is prioritised and where abuse is less likely to happen.

All Council departments are tasked with implementing safeguarding measures as part of their everyday actions, while the Social Services have a specific lead role in addressing cases where individuals are already at risk. At a corporate level, the Council ensures that staff and Members have been trained thoroughly, provide clear routes for reporting on concerns, and use the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) to ensure safer recruitment practices.

The corporate safeguarding efforts are co-ordinated via the Strategic Safeguarding Panel and the Operational Safeguarding Group, which oversee and monitor performance, policies and departmental compliance. It is the Panel's responsibility to review and update the Safeguarding Policy regularly in order to ensure that it continues to be effective and responsive to any legislative or procedural changes, reiterating the Council's commitment to safeguarding those who are vulnerable in the community.

2.2 - Safeguarding Arrangements in Schools

Since the offender's arrest, the Schools Safeguarding Policy and training pack for schools have been updated.

Since April 2023, the Education Department's Lead Safeguarding Officer has held Safeguarding Arrangements Monitoring visits at all schools in Gwynedd.

These visits include:

- Checking Safeguarding policies
- Checking training dates and levels
- Checking practical Safeguarding arrangements
- Asking the Safeguarding Designated Person, staff members and pupils about confidence levels and knowledge in relation to safeguarding
- Checking the content of the schools' Safeguarding Arrangements Annual Audit
- Offering general support / guidance.

Every school in Gwynedd has a Designated Safeguarding Person (DSP) who plays a central role in ensuring effective child protection and safeguarding. The designated person is a senior member of staff and he / she has the authority and expertise in safeguarding matters and the responsibility for co-ordinating the school's child protection policies and procedures.

The individual acts as the main point of contact for all safeguarding concerns, providing advice, guidance and support for staff. The task of the designated person is to keep records of safeguarding concerns, ensure timely referrals to appropriate authorities and train school staff ensuring that everyone understands their safeguarding responsibilities. Their role is central to nurturing a safe and supportive environment for all pupils.

The designated person works closely with the Education Department's Safeguarding Lead Officer, who provides specialist advice, support and oversight to ensure the effective implementation of safeguarding and child protection policies across all schools in the county.

Every school receives a model policy from the Education Authority and they are encouraged to make minor adjustments (e.g. amending the name of the school and designated safeguarding person to make it applicable to the school) and adopt this policy, which has been drawn up in line with the requirements of recognised guidelines and standards. It is the responsibility of the governors to ensure that effective safeguarding policies have been adopted and are reviewed at least once a year and continued support is provided to them to accomplish this. Governors must work with school leaders to create a safe environment, monitor compliance with safeguarding laws, and address any weaknesses or deficiencies in safeguarding practices in a timely manner.

The Education Authority already undertook Safeguarding inspections in every school every two years, which is above and beyond current requirements, but we have now increased capacity in the field and now undertake inspections our schools on an annual cycle. While there are no formal requirements for us to undertake such a programme, we believe that it is extremely important and we elaborate on this 2.6 below.

2.3 - Estyn's Inspection of the Council's Education Department

Estyn held an inspection of the Gwynedd Education Department in June 2023 and as part of any inspection of an education authority, the inspectors follow the following process:

"In all inspections, inspectors must report on whether the arrangements of the local authority or other provider of education services for safeguarding satisfy the needs and are not a cause for concern, or do not satisfy the needs and cause serious concern.

"Inspectors will consider to what extent there is a culture of safeguarding across the education service which supports the welfare of all learners. Also, inspectors will consider how well the local authority or other provider of education services promote a culture of safeguarding in schools, PRUs and other providers who support the welfare of all learners.

"Inspectors will assess the robustness of procedures to check the suitability of staff and other people who are connected to children, including maintaining a record of all staff who work with children and the outcomes of appropriate safeguarding recruitment checks. Inspectors will review the procedures for training staff and will check that all staff know how to respond to child protection matters.

"In inspections of local authorities, inspectors will evaluate how well the authority fulfils its statutory responsibilities in relation to safeguarding. Specifically, they will evaluate whether the authority has effective safeguarding arrangements in place, including:

- *strategic planning for, and oversight of, safeguarding in education, including reporting regularly to members*
- *appropriate support and guidance for all education services providers in its area, including the early years, play and youth support services*
- *pursue concerns noted during inspections of providers for which it is responsible*
- *appropriate safeguarding practice in its direct education services such as education other than at school, PRUs and the youth service*
- *that appropriate arrangements are in place to ensure that all partnership work that is carried out, co-ordinated or funded by the local authority keep to a high safeguarding standard*
- *that there are appropriate policies, procedures and reporting arrangements in relation to physical interventions and being pulled out of lessons*
- *pursue concerns raised by stakeholders, including parents and carers, staff and pupils of providers for whom it is responsible"*

Their findings on the Authority's safeguarding arrangements were accepted:

"The head of education and his senior management team undertake their statutory role to protect and safeguard children robustly and effectively and relevant leaders at all levels understand their roles and responsibilities. There is a robust procedure for strategic and operational meetings in relation to safeguarding issues. The representation of the education services in these processes and as part of the Corporate Parenting Panel is consistent and influential. Leaders at all levels have developed a mutual understanding with corresponding officers in children's services. As a result, they work together intelligently and productively for the benefit of the authority's children.

"The corporate safeguarding policy is appropriate and the Education Services department provides a beneficial standardised safeguarding policy for schools, together with a large number of other relevant policies and guidelines. Clear guidance and valuable and beneficial support are given to headteachers and designated persons in schools by relevant officers, such as the designated safeguarding officer for education. Training arrangements for school staff at all levels, including governors, are robust. School headteachers welcome recent developments where the designated officer visits to check the quality and challenge the safeguarding arrangements of their schools. This has had a positive effect on strengthening the culture of safeguarding across schools in Gwynedd.

"The quality of implementation of Section 5 of the Wales Safeguarding Procedures, when there are allegations against professional staff, is extremely robust and very thorough. The support and challenge given to schools by other departments in the authority on safeguarding and health and safety issues is valuable and effective. This includes clear guidance from the property and personnel departments on specific issues and risk assessments. However, the authority has not considered risk carefully enough for the inclusion hubs. Safe recruitment arrangements are robust and consistent."

In addition to that, following offender's arrest, there has been regular contact with the regulatory body and a meeting was held with them in December 2023. Following the meeting, the following comments were received from the inspector:

"We appreciate the detail which you discussed with us, including the steps taken to ensure the welfare and safety of pupils and staff and temporary leadership and governance arrangements. It is obvious that you have responded without delay to this complex matter. We know that your response includes urgent steps in the short term,

comprehensive steps over the medium term and more strategic steps with the intention of offering long-term stability."

Following the publication of Our Bravery Brought Justice, Estyn was invited to revisit the Council, this time to look at safeguarding arrangements only. Estyn and Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) were also keen to carry out an inspection in this area, and we were pleased when both bodies undertook a detailed joint Safeguarding inspection in November this year. This was an extremely detailed and thorough inspection by national specialists in Safeguarding by both organisations. We expect their report to be published in early 2026.

2.4 - Estyn Inspections in specific Schools

In accordance with the National Inspection arrangements by Estyn, every school receives a full inspection on a cycle of approximately 5 years. During COVID-19 this procedure was suspended across the country. Since restarting the procedure, 51 Gwynedd Schools have received a full Inspection which includes a part which looks at the Safeguarding arrangements, following a similar process to that explained above.

Each one of these schools reached the expected safeguarding standards.

2.5 - Investigation into events in 2019 which have been the subject of press coverage

During the court case there was reference to specific events in 2019. These events have also had considerable press coverage. As already noted, the timetable and terms of reference of the CPR were extended considerably since Jan Pickles attended a meeting with Council Members before the summer of 2024. Consequently, and in light of public interest in these specific matters, the Council commissioned an Independent Investigation into these specific matters in order reach conclusions sooner than the CPR timetable.

This work has already been carried out by Genevieve Woods, who is a barrister at Raymond Buildings, London. She specialises in such investigations and has collaborated with Jan Pickles in the past on such matters. She has extensive expertise and experience of working on safeguarding matters as well as implementing independent investigations.

She was commissioned to undertake an entirely independent investigation and not to represent the Council.

The purpose of the Independent Investigation is to establish all the facts of the events in question, consider their significance and relevance, decide whether acknowledged procedures were followed, whether appropriate action was taken under the circumstances, whether there are further steps the Council could consider and whether there are lessons to be learned.

The work has been completed and a copy of the full report was provided to the CPR and the recommendations submitted by the investigator have been transferred to the Response Board work programme.

What else needs to be delivered in order to meet our objectives?

2.6 - Safeguarding Arrangements in Schools

At the time of writing this Plan originally our staffing arrangements allowed us to hold Safeguarding Arrangements Monitoring Visits by the Lead Safeguarding Officer in every individual school every other year. We are not aware of other Authorities who do this in this way, but we believe that these inspections are valuable, and offer support to individual schools to ensure that their safeguarding arrangements are adequate and to offer them general support in this critical field.

It was concluded that it would offer more value if it would be possible to increase the frequency of these visits and that they happen every year in every school. We have therefore invested to increase the staffing resource we have in the Education Department in order to do this and strengthen our support structure for schools. We are currently investing in the Education Safeguarding and Well-being Team once more in order to be able to offer yet more support and challenge to schools on Safeguarding matters.

2.7 - Scrutiny Investigation into Safeguarding Arrangements in Schools

Our scrutiny arrangements have a critical role to play as part of the Council's formal governance arrangements and given the seriousness of the situation we face it is quite appropriate for us to be scrutinising this field.

The item 'Safeguarding Arrangements in Schools' was added as an additional item to the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee's annual work programme after the annual workshop at the request of scrutiny members and the matter was scrutinised at the Committee meeting on 18 July 2024. Following that, the possibility of holding a Task and Finish Group or a Scrutiny Investigation into the area was discussed. It was concluded that further discussion should take place on 5 September 2024 where the members present expressed a wish to check and confirm that safeguarding arrangements are as tight as possible within our schools.

A brief for the Scrutiny Investigation was considered by the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee in February 2025 ([Brief - Safeguarding Arrangements in Schools Scrutiny Investigation.pdf](#)).

The main question being considered is - '*Are the safeguarding arrangements in the county's schools appropriate and implemented consistently?*'

2.8 - Input by the Children's Commissioner

Following discussions between the Children's Commissioner, officers and Cabinet Members in July 2024 and November 2024, and then a further meeting between the Chief Executive and the Commissioner on 9 December, the Commissioner was invited to provide input to our Response Plan and to be a part of the procedure to monitor our progress on the various work streams.

That discussion is continuing and is a positive discussion.

We have stated our desire to collaborate openly and positively with the Commissioner and her officers and we appreciate the opportunities to have constructive discussions with them and receive their specialist and experienced input into fields such as these.

By now of course the Children's Commissioner is an observer on our Response Board and provides valuable challenge and guidance as we implement this Plan.

2.9 Section 47 and Part 5 Enquiries of the Safeguarding Procedures for Wales

Part 5 Safeguarding Procedures in Wales are being reviewed nationally at present. It is recommended in the Our Bravery Brought Justice report that Welsh Government ensures that the new procedures

make it a requirement for the voice of the child to be considered even if a child has not made the disclosure. This has already been implemented and is included in the Voice of the Child Policy which is to be adopted in 2026.

We will ensure that other local authorities attend formal Section 47 and Part 5 meetings if they are relevant to a child from their area, and ensure the attendance of the Chair of Governors or a governor deputising on his/her behalf when it involves a pupil or staff member from a school.

We have also introduced measures to ensure that decisions on referrals do not fall on an individual and we will also be piloting new processes for referrals involving individuals in positions of trust and the first step will be to reach out to other agencies - North Wales Police specifically, to consider the practicality and resources needed to do this.

It is recommended that multi-agency arrangements are in place to discuss referrals before reaching a decision about individuals in positions of trust. The recommendation about this is specifically for the Government and until national changes have been made, our Children services will pilot it and are currently in discussions with the other agencies.

We have already introduced changes to Part 5 discussion procedures so that all information on a child's records is reviewed when assessing their risk and vulnerability.

When there is a disclosure or concerns about individuals in a position of trust, we have already strengthened the need to assess 'suitability to work with children'.

2.10 - Low-level concerns

It is necessary to strengthen and standardise the process of reporting low-level concerns, which are concerns that do not meet the safeguarding or child protection threshold, across our services. The 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' guidance requires schools in England to develop and implement a Low-Level Concerns Policy ('Adult Conduct of Concerns Policy'). One of the recommendations in the *Our Bravery Brought Justice Report* is that the Welsh Government should consider making this a requirement for schools in Wales as well.

While this matter is being considered at a national level, and rather than waiting for change, the Council will develop a centralised system to ensure that records are kept by Human Resources of any staff member who has been the subject of concerns under Part 5. These concerns will be clearly noted on the individual's HR records, with an appropriate flagging mechanism to ensure that the concerns are recognised and taken into account. As some staff members tend to move between neighbouring counties, we will explore the possibility of sharing this information with those local authorities until national guidance is in place.

Clear instructions will be developed to accompany this arrangement, to ensure clarity regarding responsibilities, roles, and implementation procedures.

2.11 - Learning from Our Bravery Brought Justice

We are currently creating an electronic version which will be promoted. We are trying to make it as accessible and easy for anyone to find it. We are also promoting an open culture whilst dealing with referral and are willing to receive information over the phone rather than waiting for a form to be filled before dealing with a matter. We will encourage flexibility when discussing thresholds.

2.12 - Collaboration / communication

We will improve the working relationship and the Council's contact centrally with schools, ensuring better communication and collaboration between the children and education services also. The Education Safeguarding and Welfare Team has been a significant step in the right direction to that end.

Work stream 3 – Training and Policies

What has been achieved thus far?

3.1 - Safeguarding Training and Policies

Since the offender's arrest, significant progress has been made to strengthen safeguarding arrangements. The Corporate Safeguarding Policy has been reviewed and updated to reflect changes in legislation and national guidance, ensuring that safeguarding principles are embedded across all departments. In addition, amended training packs have been provided to all staff, including mandatory modules on child protection, safeguarding adults, domestic abuse and preventing modern slavery. These arrangements are overseen by the Safeguarding Strategic Panel and the Operational Group, providing assurance that safeguarding standards are maintained and improved continually, and by now all Council Departments report on levels of completion of mandatory training at their performance challenge and support meetings.

In order to ensure that safeguarding principles have been embedded across the Council, we have established an internal audit process to assess the awareness levels among the workforce. This audit includes staff surveys, sample interviews and checking compliance with mandatory training. The results will be analysed to identify gaps in knowledge and priorities for further training. In addition, the audit will measure the effectiveness of existing policies and provide evidence of continuous improvement. This work is an essential part of our commitment to safeguarding, ensuring that all members of the workforce understand their responsibilities and act promptly to protect children and adults.

As well as providing amended training packs, we have established a continuous review process to ensure that safeguarding training in schools is current and reflects best practices. This includes monitoring compliance, analysing data on completing training, and reviewing the content of modules regularly to respond to legislative changes or national recommendations. Feedback from schools and partners is gathered systematically to improve the quality and relevance of the training. This process will ensure that all members of staff have the necessary information and skills to protect children effectively.

3.2 - Investigation into arrangements of dealing with requests under the Freedom of Information Act

As a result of the exceptional number of freedom of information requests received as a result of this exceptional case (mainly from the press) we did not manage to answer everything within the usual timescales. All these requests needed to be considered in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act. This meant reviewing the information and consider whether exceptions needed to be implemented to ensure e.g. that individuals' personal data or child protection matters were released inappropriately. We answered every request and either released the information, if appropriate to do so, or implemented an appropriate statutory exception.

In order to ensure transparency and compliance, a voluntary audit was carried out by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) on our response arrangements to FOI requests. The Audit Report has now been received and it noted '*there is a reasonable level of assurance that processes and procedures are in place and are delivering FOI compliance. The audit has identified some scope for improvement in existing arrangements to reduce the risk of non-compliance with the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)*'. This level of assurance scores second of 4 tiers of assurance levels (High, Reasonable, Limited, Very Limited).

We have adopted an action plan to respond to its recommendations, including:

- Strengthening monitoring processes to ensure responses are provided within deadlines.
- Review and refine the internal structures on using exemptions.
- Provide additional training for staff on the FOI principles and data protection.

Progress will be monitored regularly and reported to the Strategic Panel and Scrutiny Committee to ensure continuous improvement.

What else needs to be done to meet the objectives?

3.3 - Whistleblowing Policy and Training

Significant work has been carried out to review and strengthen the Whistleblowing Policy and associated training arrangements. A new version of the policy has now been created by the task group, with input from the Legal Service, Human Resources and Internal Audit. The next steps include consulting with the unions, submitting to the Corporate Management Team, and then submitting to the Full Council for final approval. After that, an awareness raising programme will be implemented, including mandatory training for managers and a new e-learning module for staff. In addition, there is ongoing work to assess the benefit of commissioning a specialist external company to support the Council to implement the policy. The work programme also includes a plan to commission a new recording and monitoring system to implement the policy, ensuring transparency and consistency. These arrangements will strengthen an open and safe culture within which staff can raise concerns without fear, reflecting recommendations identified in the previous reports.

As this is a Council policy in its capacity as an employer, operating under staff terms and conditions of employment, we will also ensure that our arrangements for reporting concerns by Members are clear and robust and that they offer a safe and confidential route. We will also ensure that these systems have a prominent place in our induction and training programme for Members so that everyone understands how and when to use them.

3.4 - Grooming Training

Further to part 1.7 of this plan which states that Safeguarding training has been adapted to include a part on grooming, we will be providing a grooming training programme to staff in the Children and Education Departments including administrative and facilities staff in schools, and relevant elected members, on how sex offenders operate and use grooming.

We will work with partners to develop an appropriate package as training packs that are already available for purchase do not meet the requirements of Our Bravery Brought Justice as they are.

3.4 - Supervision

The 'Our Bravery Brought Justice' report identified that the Welsh Government would need to review Governance arrangements in schools in Wales including ensuring that Designated Safeguarding Persons (DSPs) and their deputies receive external supervision from qualified Social Workers. The Safeguarding and Welfare Team at the Education Department currently provides information, advice and support to the DSP in schools across Gwynedd and this arrangement is unique to the county with the Team Manager in ongoing contact with the Gwynedd child protection team. With almost one hundred Designated Safeguarding Persons in schools (not including the deputy of DSPs), additional resources will need to be secured to effectively implement this recommendation – this will be

discussed further at a regional and national level first to ensure understanding and joint response to this expectation.

Work Stream 4 - School Governance

What has been achieved thus far?

4.1 Support Gwynedd School Governors

The Education system as it currently exists places responsibility on Governing Bodies (as a separate entity to local Government Education Departments) to be responsible for every individual school. These Bodies are a combination of Governors representing various stakeholders in schools and they are voluntary roles.

In order to support Governors to fulfil their role, arrangements are in place to provide training and support. These arrangements often stem from national guidelines and the training has been provided regionally.

We have already provided the following to support Governors:

- Ensure that all governing body members have a valid DBS.
- Safeguarding training for all school governors.
- Provide safeguarding training specifically for Chairs and DSPs on governing bodies.
- Mandatory training programme for governors is in place across the county.
- Continuous advice and support is available for governing bodies via the Assistant Education Support Officer.
- Support and guidance for clerks to governors, including stepping in directly to clerk at Ysgol Friars to stabilise the arrangements.
- We have published and shared a new handbook for governors, ensuring consistency and clear standards across schools.

The national system places significant burden and responsibilities on Governing Bodies and very often fulfilling the role is extremely challenging, particularly as it is on a voluntary basis for a few hours every now and then. Their duties and responsibilities are wide-ranging and challenging including finance, staffing, buildings, standard of education matters etc. Governors also face, and embrace, the challenge of promoting pupils to be full and healthy citizens, promote propriety and fairness towards everyone, including introducing the new Relationships and Sexuality Education Code successfully.

We believe that a national discussion is needed to the suitability of the current system and the burden placed on Governors, and we have written to Welsh Government asking them to consider this, noting our various frustrations with the existing system.

Since then, Welsh Government has begun a review of Governance arrangements in schools.

4.2 Review of the response to a report by an Independent Complaints Panel in 2019

In 2019 an Independent Complaints Panel was held in accordance with the complaints procedure in schools, to consider complaints against the Governing Body of Ysgol Friars.

In response, an Independent Investigation was held into the way the recommendations in the Independent Complaints Panel's Report were responded to. The main purpose of this commission was to assess whether the School, Governing Body and Council responded adequately and appropriately to the findings of the Complaints Panel Report.

This work was completed in Spring and the recommendations submitted by the investigator have been transferred to the Response Board work programme

What else needs to be delivered in order to meet our objectives?

4.3 Responding to and implementing any amendments to school governance arrangements

We are eagerly awaiting the result of Welsh Government's review to governance arrangements in schools, but in the meantime, we need to ensure that we offer the best possible training and support to governors in all our schools to deliver their challenging and wide-ranging duties, therefore, we will amend our current arrangements in order to try to ensure that these volunteers feel confident to fulfil their role and receive the appropriate support.

What we already intend to implement to support them includes developing and providing further guidance to clerks on prioritising matters, timetabling and content of governors' papers; review the range of existing training and identify alternative or more flexible ways of introducing them to ensure that all governors have timely access; and consider creating a pool of full-time clerks, who would serve the schools as and when necessary and provide independent and professional support, strengthening governance across the county.

Work Stream 5 - Restrictive Practices

What has been achieved thus far?

5.1 Restrictive practices and training

In this case, the offender was operating contrary to schools policy regarding filming incidents where restrictive practices were being used. The Local Authority has a model policy for schools and they are expected to adopt this policy. The individual school reasonable force policy is checked in quality visits by the Safeguarding Team and training is also provided to Schools by the inclusion service. An additional Safeguarding and Wellbeing Officer was recently appointed to the Team in order to be able to carry out annual quality visits.

What else needs to be delivered in order to meet our objectives?

5.2 Standardise restrictive practices and training

The authority will continue to review the content of the policy to reflect what the Government will publish as a supplement and will communicate any relevant change to the schools and governing bodies.

Currently, there are two types of training on the use of restrictive practices offered by different services and work is underway to reconcile these to ensure a consistent approach across our services. This will take place alongside work to improve staff and learners' understanding of the use of Restrictive Practices.

The authority will establish a briefing and commission an external company to evaluate the current policy, training arrangements, school support, pupil support, and compliance monitoring methods. An Education/Safeguarding/ALN Working Group has been established to lead and facilitate the implementation that will result from this evaluation.

Work Stream 6 - Crisis Planning and Crisis Response

What has been achieved thus far?

6.1 Responding to an emergency in schools

Training on dealing with emergency situations was provided to all Gwynedd Schools in 2024, arranged by the North Wales Emergency Planning Partnership for situations such as fire, accident or stabbing.

However, in this case, the emergency was a safeguarding emergency which involved the Site Manager, the Head, namely the individual who would usually take control of an emergency situation in the school.

Short-term guidelines have been shared with schools and governors, reminding them of the arrangements and to reiterate messages that in a case of an emergency they should phone 999 immediately. However, we plan to put more firm arrangements in place so that everyone is aware of their responsibility in situations like these.

What else needs to be delivered in order to meet our objectives?

6.2 Review corporate emergency planning arrangements

Emergency response plans are based on the site manager managing the situation - taking control and directing others in order to safeguard children / staff / public. We need to revise these procedures for situations in which the site manager (or the Head himself as in this case) is the one causing the risk / emergency.

In order to strengthen our ability to respond effectively to safeguarding emergencies, the new work streams will focus on creating robust arrangements for planning, co-ordinating and taking action in emergency situations. This will include developing clear protocols to respond to this in a safeguarding emergency in order to protect victims, safeguard evidence and control the alleged offender.

This could, of course, be relevant to sites more widely than schools, such as care homes or leisure centres and it is essential that emergency plans across the Council respond to this.

Work stream 7 – Supporting and stabilising Ysgol Friars

What has been achieved thus far?

7.1 - School Support Plan

Following the offender's arrest on 6 September, immediate and responsive support was provided to the school, and a School Support Plan was adopted which included external critical guidance. From October 2023 until March 2024, Sarah Sutton was appointed as a critical friend to the Acting Head, whilst Margaret Davies was appointed in order to support the Welfare Deputy Head.

In order to support the school and the welfare of staff throughout this challenging time, the Human Resources Advisers Team Leader and Assistant Head of the Education Department with responsibility for supporting the secondary sector provided supervision and operational support.

In addition, a teacher with significant experience in inclusion who until recently worked in another Secondary School within the County offers further support for between three and four days a week.

Since September 2023, the Education Department has been providing continual support and resources to the School, which includes the contribution and expertise of all staff of the Education Department, ensuring stability and continuous support for the recovery of Ysgol Friars. Support was provided to review their safeguarding policies and new policies have been adopted by the school.

Officers from the Education Department have been meeting Union representatives regularly as well, taking the opportunity to listen to concerns and try to share timely information with them.

7.2 - Amend the Governing Body

Following the offender's sentencing in May 2024, the Council reviewed the Authority's membership on the Governing Body including appointing four Members on behalf of the Authority.

In addition, other members left and by now 14 out of the 19 members of the Governing Body are new to their roles with a new Chair appointed.

Ongoing support is given by Officers of the Education Department in order to train and offer practical support to the new governors of the School.

The Authority now provides clerking support to the Governing Body.

7.3 - Changes to the Senior Leadership Team

The School's Senior Leadership Team has seen substantial changes since the offender's arrest. As well as the imprisonment of the offender, other members of the Senior Leadership Team have left their roles and an entirely new Team is now in place.

The responsibilities of the Designated Safeguarding Officer who was part of the Senior Leadership Team have also been transferred to a different member of staff.

The School received supervision from Margaret Davies, who is an experienced headteacher and, at the time, a headteacher of a school in another county.

7.4 - Appointment of Interim Head

After significant recruitment challenges, Lynne Hardcastle was appointed as acting Head to provide leadership in the period between November and the end of December 2024, initially.

Margaret Davies was appointed Head of the school for 4 terms from Easter 2025 until August 2026. The extended period in the role will be an opportunity to stabilise the school and review the operational arrangements thoroughly. It will also give an opportunity to support staff for an extended period and will give faith to the parents that the school is under new, experienced leadership with a strong background in safeguarding.

What else needs to be delivered in order to meet our objectives?

7.5 - Appointment of a new Permanent Head

Until now, the Governors have not been able to appoint a new Permanent Head for the School which is why the temporary arrangements have been put in place. The appointment of Margaret Davies until the end of the Summer Term 2026 will give the school an opportunity to stabilise and start a new chapter.

The school will start a recruitment process in order to appoint a new permanent Head early in 2026.

7.6 - Commission to review operational arrangements at the school

As the new Governing Body establishes itself, and as the interim Head has the opportunity to review all the school's arrangements, we as a Council will support them to undertake a piece of work to compare Ysgol Friars' operational arrangements with the operational arrangements in the rest of the county's schools, trying to identify differences in order to consider whether there are any operational changes that need to be made.

This work is intended to be accomplished jointly between the new Governing Body and the Education Department.

7. Further Investigations

To be completed once further investigations have been completed in January 2026.

In due course, we will receive the findings of the above-mentioned investigations and we will need to act on the various findings and recommendations. What will be expected of us will depend on those findings and recommendations and therefore we will need to review this part of this Response Plan after receiving the reports in question.

We have stated clearly from the beginning that we will embrace all the recommendations and every investigation and will implement them in full and without delay, and it is appropriate for us to restate this here.

8. Ownership and governance arrangements of the Plan

It is the Council's Cabinet that has commissioned this Response Plan.

The Response Plan was formally adopted by the Cabinet on 21 January 2025 following which a specific Response Board was established in order to co-ordinate and ensure appropriate and timely progress. Several external bodies were invited to be a part of the Board and an independent Chair was appointed and the Response Board met for the first time in March 2025.

The Response Board is chaired by Professor Sally Holland, former Children's Commissioner, who has the relevant background and experience to facilitate challenging the delivery and implementation. There are also a number of observers on the Response Board including Estyn, Care Inspectorate Wales, Welsh Government, North Wales Safeguarding Board and the Children's Commissioner.

The Chair of the Response Board reports to the Cabinet every quarter and to be confirmed in the Terms of Reference referred to above.

There is a role for the Governance and Audit Committee, the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee and the Care Scrutiny Committee also to scrutinise progress and delivery (as well as completing the Scrutiny Investigation noted in part 2.7).

The content of this Plan will need to be reviewed regularly and as the situation develops. This is a live plan, and it is unavoidable that it will change as we move from the investigation and learning phase to the recovery phase.

It is unavoidable that progress will be difficult to measure as many matters will be open to personal opinion. One measure will be completing all the individual steps identified in the Plan's Work Streams and a comprehensive and detailed action plan exists to track them which has over 200 tasks and actions to deliver the objectives of this plan. The Board has also agreed a series of impact measures, including regular monitoring of young people's, parents and staff views on the effectiveness of safeguarding in schools. However, it must be acknowledged that delivering all of this will be a long-term process and we will commit to doing so, come what may.

9. Communication plan

Before publishing Our Bravery Brought Justice in November 2025, there were restrictions on the Council's ability to fully communicate information so as not to interfere with the work of the independent reviewers. Following the publication of the report, the Council is now able to share much more information about the work to adapt and strengthen our arrangements in response to the findings and recommendations. However, it is important to note that we must continue to tread carefully with matters that relate to individual cases involving children and/or adults, or that are Human Resources issues.

The original Communication Plan – which included a series of sub-plans to communicate information to key stakeholders – has been completed. Work has now begun to create a new Communication Plan that will be based on the workstreams in the revised Response Plan.

In addition, a web page has been established so that any statements and relevant information are kept in one place – www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/ymatebidroseddu

Appendix 2

Programme Board – Response Plan

Progress Report – 8 December 2025

Theme 1 - Voice of the Child and Supporting Victims Reporting Officer: Gwern Ap Rhisiart	
1. Theme Aim:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ensuring that children are listened to, believed, and taken seriously.Giving children and young people a voice in processes designed to keep them safe.To do everything within our ability to support the victims and survivors.
2. Guidance sought from the Board:	<p>We ask the Board to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Challenge and scrutinize progressOffer any further guidance on the next steps. <p>Specific guidance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Should we move forwards ourselves or wait for WG material? (e.g. CPR-3)
3. Progress to date:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Task and finish group established across Education and Children's Departments to develop a draft policy (Voice of the Child) with the input of the youth forum.Education Department has incorporated information on “grooming” into the school safeguarding training package for the start of the academic year (Sept 2025)Young People Forum Coordinator employed to help consult with the County Youth Forum - giving young people the opportunity to voice their opinion and contribute to discussions.Working closely with RASAC Gogledd Cymru to ensure suitable, tailored personal support plans are in place for victimsInitial scoping work done to understand current activity across the Council relating to children's voice, participation, and rights (Chair of the Board, Sally Holland, will facilitate a workshop on Children's Rights for the Board in February 2026).
4. Challenges faced:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Resources: Corporate bid prepared to secure additional staff to support the implementation of CPR-6 (ensure that Children's Social Care always speaks directly with the child, even if the child has not made a disclosure).Awaiting further guidance: CPR-3 Information about “grooming” in the school safeguarding package – should we move forwards ourselves or wait for WG material?
5. Next steps / key milestones:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Develop a policy on listening to the voice of the child – by April 2026

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement training for staff to recognise and document behavioural changes in children that could signal grooming or abuse – by March 2026. • Supporting victims of trauma and tailoring support to correspond with the individual's needs – Ongoing • Roll out new Bromcom system across all Gwynedd schools, alongside training and awareness raising campaign – by September 2027 • Review the feedback gathered from the County Youth Forum and seek approval for any proposed actions – January 2026 • Create a practical action plan that sets out clear priorities, responsibilities, and timelines for embedding a child-centred culture across all services – by April 2026 																				
6. Risks/Resources:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TBC – dependant on feedback from the Youth Forum 																				
7. Timescales:	<table border="1"> <tr><td>CPR - 1</td><td>April 2026</td></tr> <tr><td>CPR - 2</td><td>April 2026</td></tr> <tr><td>CPR - 3</td><td>March 2026</td></tr> <tr><td>CPR - 4</td><td>Sept 2027</td></tr> <tr><td>CPR - 6</td><td>Tbc</td></tr> <tr><td>CPR - 7</td><td>January 2026</td></tr> <tr><td>CPR - 8</td><td>Tbc</td></tr> <tr><td>CPR - 9 RP - A4 RP - A1</td><td>Ongoing</td></tr> <tr><td>RP- A5</td><td>Ongoing</td></tr> <tr><td>NEW - 1</td><td>March 2026</td></tr> </table>	CPR - 1	April 2026	CPR - 2	April 2026	CPR - 3	March 2026	CPR - 4	Sept 2027	CPR - 6	Tbc	CPR - 7	January 2026	CPR - 8	Tbc	CPR - 9 RP - A4 RP - A1	Ongoing	RP- A5	Ongoing	NEW - 1	March 2026
CPR - 1	April 2026																				
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CPR - 6	Tbc																				
CPR - 7	January 2026																				
CPR - 8	Tbc																				
CPR - 9 RP - A4 RP - A1	Ongoing																				
RP- A5	Ongoing																				
NEW - 1	March 2026																				

Theme 2 - Managing Allegations and Concerns about Adults working with Children <i>Reporting Officer: Dylan Owen</i>	
1. Theme Aim:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect children by ensuring concerns are taken seriously and acted upon quickly. • Ensure that Section 5 arrangements support a consistent and robust multi-agency response to allegations and concerns about adults working with children.
2. Guidance sought from the Board:	<p>We ask the Board to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Challenge and scrutinise progress - Offer any further guidance on the next steps. <p>Specific guidance:</p> <p>- <i>CPR-15, RP-C2, RP-C2a – are the Board satisfied with the decision to wait for Welsh Government Guidance?</i></p>
3. Progress to date:	

	<p>Section 5 Referrals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every child involved in the referral (in some instances where the child has referred another child and the disclosure is not about them) is visited and listened to by a social worker. • Amended Strategy discussion and strategy meeting templates so that previous safeguarding information on the child's records is captured and shared. • The referral form has been added to the website under Child Abuse, Children and Family Support, and Keeping Pupils Safe. An email has also been sent to all Gwynedd school headteachers with the form attached as a reminder. • Currently referrals are screened by the IAA and discussions take place with either the LADO or the DOS as to the need to instigate Part 5 procedures. <p>Low-Level Concerns Policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A scoping exercise on the Policies used in England has been completed. • On 18.11.25, staff from Education, Safeguarding (Children and Adults) and Human Resources met to consider what Gwynedd could implement while awaiting clarification from the Welsh Government. <p>Schools Safeguarding and Well-being Team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The team has advertised for a 4th member. 9 have applied, there will be appointment before the end of this term. • The Safeguarding and Well-being Team meets with operational management Teams (Children's Department) to ensure a better understanding of roles.
<p>4. Challenges faced:</p>	<p><i>CPR-12: It is a requirement that thresholds for invoking the procedures are decided at a multi-agency meeting and not solely by the LADO, and take into consideration previous concerns, complaints and allegations.</i></p> <p>Coordinating multi-agency threshold decisions can be time-consuming and difficult to schedule, which risks delaying urgent safeguarding actions. The Children's Department will work with North Wales Police and partner agencies to explore options such as regular scheduled meetings. Further discussion is anticipated on this matter and viability across the region at the December NWSB.</p> <p><i>CPR-15, RP-C2, RP-C2a - Welsh Government consider requiring schools to develop an 'Adult Conduct of Concerns Policy' (known in England as a Low-level Concerns Policy) considering producing guidance on safe working practice.</i></p> <p>Due to concerns about:</p>

	<p>1. The limited value of a Gwynedd-only approach when staff frequently work across the North and Mid Wales region, 2. data management implications, and 3. HR and fair work issues, including the absence of a statutory definition of “low-level concerns”,</p> <p>The decision was made to delay implementing a Low-Level Concerns Policy until national guidance is issued by the Welsh Government.</p> <p>In the meantime, the Council is considering reinstating a central record of staff involved in Part 5 safeguarding processes, but with clearer criteria and definitions. It is engaging with neighbouring local authorities to review their approaches and identify elements that could be adopted in Gwynedd.</p>
<p>5. Next steps/key milestones:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The plan is to recruit an additional Designated Officer for Safeguarding (DOS) who will also develop an audit plan for the Department. The audit plan will include reviewing who attends strategy discussions and the quality of decision-making records. Set up regular joint manager meetings (e.g., quarterly) to strengthen collaboration between the Education and Children and Supporting Families Departments. A further meeting is planned with Adult Services to consider wider implications for Safeguarding threshold decision making. Work with the IT department to develop a digital version of the referral form so that users no longer need to download a PDF and send through an email. To note that the form is a regional document and there are currently plans to adopt a nationwide single referral form.
<p>6. Risks/Resources:</p>	<p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employ additional DOS who will also lead on the Audit Framework for the Department. The Department will assess whether additional resources or staffing will be necessary to support the recommendation that multi-agency discussions take place to assess thresholds for any concerns involving individuals in positions of trust. <p>Risk:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring ownership of systems change by the workforce.

7. Timescales:	CPR -11	tbc
	CPR - 14	Tbc
	RP- B5	Ongoing
	CPR - 15	Oct 25 –
	RP- C2	April 26
	RP - C2a	
	CPR - 12	Tbc
	CPR - 5	Sept 25
	NEW- 2	Ongoing
	NEW- 3	Ongoing
	NEW- 4	tbc
	NEW - 5	Ongoing
	NEW- 6	Ongoing
	NEW- 7	Ongoing
	CPR - 10	Tbc
	CPR 16	tbc
	RP- B2	Ongoing
	NEW- 8	Ongoing
	NEW- 9	Ongoing
	NEW- 10	Ongoing

Theme 3 - Training and Policies Reporting Officer: Ian Jones	
1. Theme Aim:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring that staff are trained to “think the unthinkable” and understand that “it could happen here”
2. Guidance sought from the Board:	<p>We ask the Board to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Challenge and scrutinize progress - Offer any further guidance on the next steps. <p>Specific guidance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CPR-18, 19 - Should we add slides on Finklehor model into training packages or await development of a recognised training?
3. Progress to date:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whistleblowing Policy has been amended and circulated with the Board for comments (see <i>Agenda item 5</i>). Safeguarding and Well-being Team within the Education Department provides information, advice and support to the Designated Safeguarding Persons in schools across Gwynedd. Appointment of Safeguarding Champion role to promote and raise awareness All department's performance dashboard reports on the % of staff who have completed Safeguarding and VAWDASV training with regular monitoring in place over mandatory training uptake. All schools have received a Monitoring Visit within the past two years, and an annual visiting schedule is in

	place since January 2025 onwards (this goes beyond the national guidance of a visit every 2 years).														
4. Challenges faced:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dependencies around training provision from other bodies, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No recognised training provision in place for modus operandi of sex offenders and sex offender grooming (Finklehor model) Awaiting response from Social Care Wales to determine how the training delivered in Gwynedd can be adapted (additional safeguarding record-keeping training) Regular training and supervision of LADO RP-B6 – <i>Scrutiny inspection of safeguarding arrangements</i> - Expected to report to Scrutiny Committee in December 2025 but this has slipped to 12 February 2026 due to the process of procuring and appointing external provider to undertake research on voice of the child. 														
5. Next steps/key milestones:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopt amended whistleblowing policy – Cabinet (Jan 26), Full Council (March 26) and implement the policy (April 26) Clear communication plan for all Council staff, ensuring it meets the needs of frontline teams – November 2025. Subgroup to develop and produce practical tools to reinforce and promote the importance of safeguarding training across the Council - Tbc Add additional safeguarding record-keeping training to the existing e-module with SCW agreement - November 2025. Scrutiny Inspection Report (Safeguarding Arrangements) - February 2026 Further review of Corporate Safeguarding Policy – April 2026 														
6. Risks/Resources:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resources: CPR-24 - With almost 100 Designated Safeguarding Persons in schools (not including deputy DSP's), additional resources will be needed to implement this recommendation effectively. Resources: RP-B2 - Work to be done on email accounts for staff (particularly frontline) to enable them to complete mandatory training. Bid has been submitted for significant funding in order to improve this. 														
7. Timescales:	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>CPR - 17</td><td>Tbc by WG</td></tr> <tr> <td>CPR - 18</td><td>Tbc</td></tr> <tr> <td>CPR - 19</td><td>Tbc (see CPR-18)</td></tr> <tr> <td>CPR - 20</td><td>April 2026</td></tr> <tr> <td>CPR - 13</td><td>Tbc</td></tr> <tr> <td>CPR - 24</td><td>Tbc</td></tr> <tr> <td>RP- C2</td><td>December 2025</td></tr> </table>	CPR - 17	Tbc by WG	CPR - 18	Tbc	CPR - 19	Tbc (see CPR-18)	CPR - 20	April 2026	CPR - 13	Tbc	CPR - 24	Tbc	RP- C2	December 2025
CPR - 17	Tbc by WG														
CPR - 18	Tbc														
CPR - 19	Tbc (see CPR-18)														
CPR - 20	April 2026														
CPR - 13	Tbc														
CPR - 24	Tbc														
RP- C2	December 2025														

RP- B1b	Ongoing
RP- B2	Completed
RP- C2d	Ongoing
NEW- 11	Tbc
RP- B1	April 2026
RP- B2	Tbc
RP- B1a	June 2026
RP- B1c	Completed
RP- B5	Completed
RP- B6	December 2025

Theme 4 - Governance <i>Reporting Officer: Tbc</i>	
1. Theme Aim:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that school governors understand their roles and responsibilities or keeping children safe • Ensure there are systems in place that measures the wider health and culture of schools
2. Guidance sought from the Board:	<p>We ask the Board to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Challenge and scrutinize progress - Offer any further guidance on the next steps. <p>Specific guidance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Timescales are a risk at present – anticipate the WG review will take between 6 and 9 months. Can we move forwards sooner with some of the recommendations? How?
3. Progress to date:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandatory safeguarding training in place for all Chairs and Designated Governors for Safeguarding in schools. • Made it mandatory for Governors to complete basic safeguarding training • New governor handbook shared with all governors • Started collating information to assess school's situation including wider health and culture
4. Challenges faced:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependencies - awaiting further guidance from WG following its review of Governance arrangements within schools
5. Next steps/key milestones:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education department to develop and circulate a fixed agenda / program for the governing bodies of Gwynedd schools, which will focus on safeguarding and welfare issues, together with providing the appropriate data to help them assess the schools' situation • Respond to recommendations from WG review of Governance arrangements within schools in Wales
6. Risks/Resources:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources: RP-Ch7 - We will need an additional officer to support 94 governing bodies. Currently we have one officer. We have received a grant from WG that will allow us to appoint an additional officer.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resources: CPR-22 - We will need resources to create a dashboard that would facilitate the collection of such data. 														
7. Timescales:	<table border="1"> <tr><td>CPR - 21</td><td>tbc</td></tr> <tr><td>CPR - 22</td><td>tbc</td></tr> <tr><td>CPR - 23</td><td>tbc</td></tr> <tr><td>RP- C3</td><td>tbc</td></tr> <tr><td>RP- Ch7</td><td>tbc</td></tr> <tr><td>RP- Ch6</td><td>May 2026</td></tr> <tr><td>NEW- 12</td><td>tbc</td></tr> </table>	CPR - 21	tbc	CPR - 22	tbc	CPR - 23	tbc	RP- C3	tbc	RP- Ch7	tbc	RP- Ch6	May 2026	NEW- 12	tbc
CPR - 21	tbc														
CPR - 22	tbc														
CPR - 23	tbc														
RP- C3	tbc														
RP- Ch7	tbc														
RP- Ch6	May 2026														
NEW- 12	tbc														

Theme 5 – Restrictive Practices

Reporting Officer: Tbc

1. Theme Aim:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update guidance about filming restraint by adults, and how filmed records should be kept.
2. Guidance sought from the Board:	<p>We ask the Board to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Challenge and scrutinize progress - Offer any further guidance on the next steps.
3. Progress to date:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perpetrator acted contrary to the Schools Policy by filming cases - this is not standard practice. During QA visits we always look at the restrictive practice policy to ensure that is coincides with the model policy provided. Training is provided for free through the inclusion team.
4. Challenges faced:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to hold an internal discussion on the use of reasonable force, especially as there are currently two types of training available that teach different techniques. Education Department have specialist who are trained in CPD field and therefore harmonizing the training methods would be a good starting point to ensure a clear, consistent and safe approach across the services.
5. Next steps/key milestones:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the Councils policy on Restrictive Practices and ensure all schools adopt the model policy
6. Risks/Resources:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tbc
7. Timescales:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tbc

Theme 6 - Crisis Planning and Crisis Response

Reporting Officer: Catrin Love

1. Theme Aim:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure there is a clear, strategic and coordinated plan in place in the event of a crisis
2. Guidance sought from the Board:	<p>We ask the Board to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Challenge and scrutinize progress - Offer any further guidance on the next steps.
3. Progress to date:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal task group set up to review current plans in place at strategic and operational level to respond to

	<p>critical incidents. The work will draw on good practice regionally and nationally.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidelines in place for the Governing Body (Safeguarding Policy) since 2019. The education department will undertake checks to ensure staff are aware of this. 										
4. Challenges faced:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> tbc 										
5. Next steps/key milestones:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft plan in place by December 2026 Once plan is agreed, there will need to be a programme of implementation and training (April 2026) 										
6. Risks/Resources:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tbc 										
7. Timescales:	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>CPR - 26a</td> <td>Draft plan by 31/12/25</td> </tr> <tr> <td>CPR - 26b</td> <td>tbc</td> </tr> <tr> <td>CPR - 26c</td> <td>tbc</td> </tr> <tr> <td>CPR - 26d</td> <td>April 2026</td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>PR- C2e</i></td> <td><i>Completed</i></td> </tr> </table>	CPR - 26a	Draft plan by 31/12/25	CPR - 26b	tbc	CPR - 26c	tbc	CPR - 26d	April 2026	<i>PR- C2e</i>	<i>Completed</i>
CPR - 26a	Draft plan by 31/12/25										
CPR - 26b	tbc										
CPR - 26c	tbc										
CPR - 26d	April 2026										
<i>PR- C2e</i>	<i>Completed</i>										

Appendix 3

Theme 1 - Voice of the Child and Supporting Victims

No	Ref	Task ref	Theme	Recommendation / Objective	Action	Can CG take action:	Relevant to:	Responsibility - Cyngor Gwynedd	Timescale	RAG	Task / Ongoing	Task Completed	Measure	Resources	What has already changed?	What still needs to be done?
1	CPR - 1		Theme 1 - Voice of the Child and Supporting Victims	All organisations that work with children must ensure that their policies on listening to the voice of the child are reviewed, fully implemented and reflect the learning from this Review	The Council will develop a policy on listening to the voice of the child and ensure its effective implementation.	Yes	All organisations	Dylan Owen	By April 2026	Yellow	Task		YES	Yes	In relation to safeguarding, we recognise that there is currently no single policy document that captures existing practices and measures. One meeting has been held with the Youth Service Manager and the Education Engagement Coordinator. An initial meeting of the Task and Finish Group to discuss the policy will take place (8 December 2025)	The next stage of the work will involve the Task and Finish Group undertaking an audit of current practices to establish a clear baseline. The Group will agree its Terms of Reference and begin developing a draft "Voice of the Child" policy. Input from the Youth Forum will be sought to ensure that the perspectives of children and young people are fully reflected in the policy's development. The draft policy and associated measures will then be presented to the Response Board, for consultation and feedback. Following this, the revised draft will be submitted to the Leadership Team for consideration and subsequently to Cabinet for final approval. The Council is also keeping in mind the emerging regional approach. The NWSB has stated its intention to collaborate with the Children's Commissioner for Wales' Participation Officer to identify and advance good practice in engaging with children on safeguarding issues.
		1.1"	"	Set up a task and finish group across both Education and Children's Departments	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Sharron Carter	November 2025	Grey	Task	yes				Relevant officers across departments have been identified and the first meeting is being held on the 8th December and will focus initially on drawing up TOR.	
		1.2"	"	Conduct a scoping exercise to examine practices and approaches used by other councils.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Sharron Carter	December 2025	Yellow	Task	no					
		1.3"	"	Task group to undertake an audit of the Education and Children's Department current practices - including statutory processes	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Sharron Carter / Gwern ap Rhisiart	December 2025	Yellow	Task						
		1.4"	"	Draft of the written policy	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Sharron Carter	February 2025	Yellow	Task						
		1.5"	"	Present a draft policy and measures to relevant stakeholders, e.g. Response Board	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Sharron Carter	February 2026	Yellow	Task						
		1.6"	"	Present the draft policy to Leadership Team	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Dylan Owen	March 2026	Yellow	Task						
		1.7"	"	Present the draft policy to Cabinet for final approval	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Dylan Owen	April 2026	Yellow	Task						
		1.8"	"	Whilst the Policy is being developed, any good practice identified at a regional level can be incorporated.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd / Regional Safeguarding Board	Dylan Owen / Sharron Carter	Ongoing	Yellow	Ongoing						
		1.9"	"	Monitor and revise policy every 2 years	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Dylan Owen	April 2028	Yellow	Ongoing						
2	CPR - 2		Theme 1 - Voice of the Child and Supporting Victims	Organisations must be able to evidence to their professional Board and Regulators that they have a mechanism for listening to children and that this is embedded and functioning	Cyngor Gwynedd will need to establish and evidence systems for listening to children, with clear measures in place and regular reporting to the relevant professional boards and regulators.	Yes	All organisations / Regulators	Dylan Owen	By April 2026	Yellow	Ongoing		YES	Yes	The measures will be developed alongside the "Voice of the Child Policy" See Ref: CPR-1 on Policy development	The measures will be developed alongside the "Voice of the Child Policy" See Ref: CPR-1 on Policy development
		2.1"	"	Develop measures to ensure effective and consistent implementation of listening to the Voice of the Child arrangements across the Council. These will be included in the Policy (see ref: CPR-1)	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Sharron Carter	April 2026	Yellow	Task		YES				
		2.2"	"	The NWSB has noted its intention to track and learn from Regulatory Inspections, and ensure all statutory board partners present findings from inspections including feedback on the voice of the child.	Yes	Regional Safeguarding Board / All Local Authorities	Dylan Owen	Ongoing	Yellow	Ongoing		YES				
3	CPR - 3		Theme 1 - Voice of the Child and Supporting Victims	All agencies must ensure their staff are trained to identify and record behavioural changes in a child which may indicate that they are being groomed and/or abused.	Implement training for staff to recognise and document behavioural changes in children that could signal grooming or abuse.	Yes	All organisations	Dylan Owen	By March 2026	Yellow	Ongoing		YES	Yes - any external training package costs	The Education Department has incorporated information on "grooming" into the school safeguarding training package for the start of the academic year (Sept 2025). The Children's Department has also reviewed the training currently provided to its workforce. While elements relating to grooming are included within several existing modules for example, CSE, CCE, and Trauma-Informed Practice, there was no dedicated training specifically focused on grooming. The Department has therefore undertaken an extensive review of potential training options (including courses from NSPCC and the Lucy Faithfull Foundation) that focus specifically on grooming, recognising the signs of grooming in children, and understanding the methods used by sexual offenders.	Determine and roll out an appropriate training package for the Children Department workforce during 2026/27, in addition to working with the NWSB to support the implementation of associated regional training.
		3.1"	"	Review training already in place within the Children's Department	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Sharron Carter	September 2025	Green	Task	yes					
		3.2	"	Include information about "grooming" in the school safeguarding package	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Gwern Ap Rhisiart	September 2025	Green	Task	yes		If there is an ask for us to move quicker than Welsh Government in terms of training material we will need to commission this.	Slides have been included in the training materials shared with schools for this academic year. They were based on materials we were given by the NSPCC.	There needs to be more detail in the materials, this should come with the materials from W.G.	
		3.3"	"	Research the range of training and resources offered by external providers.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Sharron Carter	October 2025	Green	Task	yes					
		3.4"	"	Decide on training package for 2026/27	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Sharron Carter	December 2025	Yellow	Task						

				The NWSB has also announced its intention to develop a regional training programme for the safeguarding workforce across Children's Services and Education, which is a welcome and beneficial step.	Not directly	Regional Safeguarding Board	Dylan Owen (as NWSB representative)	December 2025 (date noted by NWSB)		Ongoing					
		3.5		Implement a training package, whether delivered regionally or commissioned by Gwynedd in the interim.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Sharron Carter	By March 2026		Ongoing		YES			
4 CPR - 4		3.6		In schools these changes must be recorded on an electronic data management system	Record any behavioural changes that may indicate grooming on an electronic data management system.	Yes	Schools	Gwern ap Rhisiart	Tbc	Ongoing			The system has been purchased from a budget that we already had.		Purchase the new Bromcom system and roll it out across all Gwynedd schools, alongside training and awareness-raising on the updated process for recording behaviours and events (not limited to concerns about grooming only)
		4.1	"	Purchase of new system (Bromcom) to replace "My Concern"	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Gwern Ap Rhisiart	January 2026		Task			The system has been purchased from a budget that we already had.	We have bought the new system	We need to migrate from one system to another and this will take time.
		4.2	"	Roll out of Bromcom to all Gwynedd schools	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Gwern Ap Rhisiart	September 2027		Task			The system will be fully rolled out September 2027.		
		4.3	"	Training and raising awareness of the new way of recording any behaviours/events on the system	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Gwern Ap Rhisiart	Tbc		Task			We may need, dependant on timelines, to purchase additional training capacity.	Training is part of the system roll out. No school can start with Bromcom without basic training. Training for the safeguarding element will be rolled out as we bring the use of My Concern to an end.	Deliver training plan as system is rolled out. The Safeguarding Team has been involved in the purchase of Bromcom and has been a part of discussing the training needs.
		4.4	"	Review the effectiveness of the system	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd / Regulators	Gwern Ap Rhisiart	Tbc		Ongoing		YES			
5 CPR - 6			Theme 1 - Voice of the Child and Supporting Victims	When a referral is made under Wales Safeguarding Procedures Section 5 and is third party, the child who is subject of the referral must be spoken to by children's social care, even where they have not made a disclosure themselves	Ensure that when a Section 5 third-party referral is received, Children's Social Care always speaks directly with the child, even if the child has not made a disclosure.	Yes	All Local Authorities	Dylan Owen	Tbc	Task	yes	YES	Yes - A corporate bid has been prepared to secure additional staff to support implementation of this requirement.	The Children's Department is now ensuring that each and every child involved in the referral (in some instances where the child has referred another child and the disclosure is not about them) is visited and listened to by a social worker.	Discussion anticipated at the NWSB regarding the approach to this recommendation across the region.
		5.1	"	"		Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd				yes				
6 CPR - 7			Theme 1 - Voice of the Child and Supporting Victims	LA1 should consult with pupils to identify how best to provide access to an external individual or service, outside of school, to whom pupils can report concerns or worries. Contact details to be displayed prominently in all schools	Cyngor Gwynedd should consult with pupils to decide the best way to give them access to an external person or service outside school for reporting concerns. The contact details must then be displayed prominently in all schools.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Gwern ap Rhisiart	Tbc	Task			Possible - depending on Youth Forum feedback	The Council has started the consultation process through the County Youth Forum, giving young people the opportunity to voice their opinion and contribute to discussions.	Review the feedback gathered from the County Youth Forum, identify key themes and recommendations from young people, and—based on this evidence—seek approval for any proposed actions or resource allocations.
		6.1	"	"	Remind all Headteachers of the need to display posters with the NSPCC's contact details in prominent places across schools	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Gwern Ap Rhisiart	September 2025	Task			No	Reminders have been sent during this academic year. No QA visit has noted a lack of appropriate materials in prominent places across the schools.	We will continue to remind all schools on a regular basis. Officers from all parts of the Education Department will seek these posters during other visits to add another level of certainty.
		6.2	"	"	Consultation with pupils about the possibility of having an individual outside the school to report concerns	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Gwern Ap Rhisiart	September 2025 - January 2026	Task			No	The Young People Forum Coordinator has designed a workshop to be delivered to each secondary school council in Gwynedd. Holding these sessions within individual schools is expected to provide stronger, more detailed feedback and a clearer overall picture across the county. The workshop will focus on key safeguarding questions and pupil voice, exploring how safe learners feel, how well the school listens to concerns, and what improvements could be made. A further meeting will be arranged shortly to finalise the workshop content and the approach to collecting responses, with the current proposal being a questionnaire to summarise findings from each visit. The intention was to begin visiting schools in early autumn but we have had many requests to consult with pupils on the same issue, this included scrutiny committee and Estyn. We believe that some sessions can happen before the end of this term with the rest to follow in January.	The sessions need to be delivered and findings collated.
		6.3	"	"	Identify best option moving forwards and any resources that might be needed	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Gwern Ap Rhisiart	February 2026	Ongoing			The department has secured funding to continue with the role of Young People Forum Coordinator	We have committed to continue with the role of the Young People Forum Coordinator.	
7 CPR - 8			Theme 1 - Voice of the Child and Supporting Victims	Welsh Government develop the curriculum to ensure that pupils gain the knowledge to understand adult grooming behaviours and know how to report safely to an adult	Curriculum changes to ensure pupils understand adult grooming behaviours and reporting	No	Welsh Government	Gwern ap Rhisiart	Tbc	Ongoing					Cyngor Gwynedd follows the National Curriculum and is eager to introduce any changes presented by the Welsh Government after they have fully considered the matter.
		7.1	"	"	Implement any changes to the curriculum proposed by the Welsh Government once they have fully considered the matter.	No	Cyngor Gwynedd	Gwern ap Rhisiart	Tbc	Ongoing			We will need to see the proposed changes before deciding on possible resources.		

8	CPR - 9 RP - A4 RP - A1	Theme 1 - Voice of the Child and Supporting Victims	All Local Authorities should evidence that they support and advocate for victims of trauma, on a case-by-case basis, where their access to education has been limited by their experience. This would include ensuring that victims have access to further and higher education and accompanying funds where grade requirements and attendance have not been met due to the trauma experienced	Supporting victims of trauma and tailoring support to correspond with the individual's needs.	Yes	All Local Authorities	Gwern ap Rhisiart	Ongoing	Yellow	Ongoing				The Council continues to work closely with RASAC Gogledd Cymru to ensure suitable, tailored personal support plans are in place for victims. This is discussed regularly in the Victim Support Panel and via direct discussions with individuals in receipt of services. Counselling support and emotional/wellbeing support is also available for victims and survivors, pupils and staff. Letter sent out to all the victims in the day leading up to the CPR announcement acknowledging the difficult period ahead and reminding them of the support available through RASAC. Ongoing discussions between Children's Services and some of the ISVAs and the victims around tailored support.	Identify potential packages of support for other victims who might come forwards in the future
9	RP- A5	Theme 1 - Voice of the Child and Supporting Victims	Deal with applications for compensation - Resolve outstanding proceedings in a timely manner	Continue working closely with RASAC Gogledd Cymru to ensure suitable, tailored personal support plans are in place for victims. This is discussed regularly in the Victim Support Panel and Mappa3.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Sharron Carter	Ongoing	Green	Ongoing		YES			
				Wider Support - Counselling support and emotional/well-being support for victims and survivors, pupils and staff	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Sharron Carter/Gwern Ap Rhisiart	Ongoing	Green	Ongoing		YES			
				Identify potential packages of support for other victims who might come forwards in the future	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Sharron Carter/Gwern Ap Rhisiart	Ongoing	Yellow	Ongoing		YES			
9	RP- A5	Theme 1 - Voice of the Child and Supporting Victims	Deal with applications for compensation - Resolve outstanding proceedings in a timely manner	Process compensation claims and resolve outstanding cases promptly.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Nia Grisdale	Ongoing	Yellow	Task	yes			Any matters received are now with specialist lawyers, who will work toward a timely resolution, supported by the Council's legal department.	
10	NEW - 1	Theme 1 - Voice of the Child and Supporting Victims	Voice and Experiences of Children and Young People In addition to the content of the CPR report, ongoing work is being carried out with: - Supporting the growth and confidence of the County Youth Forum - School Councils - Child Friendly County initiatives - Promoting Children's Rights - Trauma-Informed County training programmes	Any matters received are now with specialist lawyers, who will work toward a timely resolution, supported by the Council's legal department.	Yellow	Cyngor Gwynedd	Nia Grisdale	Ongoing	Green	Task					
				Co-ordinate a Council-wide, strategic approach to the Voice and Experiences of Children and Young People (Children's Rights Approach), embedding a strong, child-centred culture across all services.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Dylan Owen / Gwern ap Rhisiart	Ongoing	Yellow	Task		YES	Possible - training costs	A small group of officers and Councillors has met to begin exploring this work and to gain an initial understanding of current activity across the Council relating to children's voice, participation, and rights. While there are clear strengths within the Youth Forum, it is recognised that it needs time to develop and grow naturally, with appropriate support from the Council. Initial contact has also been made with UNICEF (Child Friendly Cities) and the Children's Commissioner for Wales to gather information on available guidance and frameworks. This early scoping provides a starting point for developing a more coordinated and consistent approach. A meeting was held with the Children's Commissioner for Wales and her officers during which the discrepancy in funding for Ageing Well projects with Child Friendly projects by the Welsh Government was highlighted.	The next step is to create a practical action plan that sets out clear priorities, responsibilities, and timelines for embedding a child-centred culture across all services. The Youth Forum will play a vital role in guiding this work and helping to shape the principles that underpin our approach. The Chair of the Board, Sally Holland, will facilitate a workshop on Children's Rights for the Board in February 2026. Wider engagement across the Council will also be essential, for example, raising awareness of the Children's Rights Approach, providing practical guidance for staff, and ensuring every service understands its role. Continued collaboration with UNICEF and the Children's Commissioner will support the development of this framework, helping to ensure that the Council's approach is coordinated, achievable, and aligned with national expectations.
				Build a basic picture of what is already happening across the Council in relation to children's voice, participation, and rights.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Dylan Owen	November 2025	Green	Task	yes				
				Contact UNICEF (Child Friendly Cities) and the Children's Commissioner to collect guidance and frameworks that can inform the Council's approach.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Dylan Owen	November 2026	Green	Task	yes				
				Develop a practical action plan with responsibilities, and timelines.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Dylan Owen	January 2026?	Yellow	Task					
11	NEW - 2	Theme 1 - Voice of the Child and Supporting Victims	Children's Rights workshop arranged for Board Members (February 2026)	Children's Rights workshop arranged for Board Members (February 2026)	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Dylan Owen	February 2026	Yellow	Task					
				Present Action Plan to the Board for approval	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Dylan Owen	February 2026	Yellow	Task					

Theme 2 - Managing Allegations and Concerns about Adults working with Children

No	Ref	Task ref	Theme	Recommendation / Objective	Action	Can CG take action:	Relevant to:	Responsibility - Cyngor Gwynedd	Timescale	RAG	Task / Ongoing	Task Completed	Measure	Resources	What has already changed?	What still needs to be done?	
11	CPR-11		Theme 2 - Managing Allegations and Concerns about Adults working with Children	The revised procedures make it a requirement that the voice of the child is heard, even where a child has not made a disclosure.		Not directly	Welsh Government	Dylan Owen	Tbc	Yellow	Ongoing				The Children's Department is now ensuring that each and every child involved in the referral (in some instances where the child has referred another child and the disclosure is not about them) is visited and listened to by a social worker.	The Council will be developing specific measures to be included in the "Voice of the Child" Policy document, and any measures recommended by the NWSB will also be incorporated. (See CPR-1 recommendation)	
12	CPR-14		Theme 2 - Managing Allegations and Concerns about Adults working with Children	Safeguarding Boards require and scrutinise Local Authority reports on allegation management on at least an annual basis, and that reporting on allegations becomes part of the Estyn and CIW regulatory requirements.		Not directly	Regional Safeguarding Board / Regulators	Dylan Owen	Tbc	Yellow	Ongoing					NWSB has noted its intention to include performance information around compliance on this action in its annual report. The regional delivery group will undertake an annual audit on section 5 practice.	
13	RP- B5		Theme 2 - Managing Allegations and Concerns about Adults working with Children	The regulatory body (ESTYN) is conducting inspections in individual schools and is reporting whether the safeguarding arrangements on a local (school) level meet the requirements	Work with ESTYN to support and respond to school-level inspections, ensuring that safeguarding arrangements in individual schools meet regulatory requirements.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd / Estyn	Gwern ap Rhisiart	Ongoing	Green	Ongoing	yes	Yes		Estyn shares any safeguarding concerns from school inspections with Gwynedd and these are discussed during their termly meetings with the Authority. Monitoring and risk mitigation arrangements are in place.	We will need to monitor all schools through out QA visits and ensure that any school that have safeguarding findings following an Estyn visit are supported to address those issues. We aim to visit all schools once every year, this will allow us to have all schools Estyn ready but more importantly safe.	
13.1	"		Theme 2 - Managing Allegations and Concerns about Adults working with Children	Estyn corresponds with Gwynedd where safeguarding concerns are highlighted in an inspection. These are discussed in Estyn's termly visits with the Authority.	Estyn corresponds with Gwynedd where safeguarding concerns are highlighted in an inspection. These are discussed in Estyn's termly visits with the Authority.	Yes	Estyn/Cyngor Gwynedd	Gwern Ap Rhisiart / Dyfrig Ellis	Ongoing	Green	Ongoing	yes	Yes	This is dependant on the findings. We will support schools in securing boundaries for example.			
14	CPR - 15 RP- C2 RP - C2a		Theme 2 - Managing Allegations and Concerns about Adults working with Children	Welsh Government consider requiring schools to develop an 'Adult Conduct of Concerns Policy' (known in England as a 'Low-level Concerns Policy') considering producing guidance on safe working practice. Barrister's Report - Recommendation 2: Ensuring that records relating to safeguarding matters are stored in a secure central location, rather than being kept separately in the files of individual staff members Barrister's Report also noted that the Council should implement clearer guidelines for dealing with informal concerns, which are issues that reveal a safeguarding risk raised outside the context of the formal referral process.	Welsh Government consider requiring schools to develop an 'Adult Conduct of Concerns Policy' (known in England as a 'Low-level Concerns Policy') considering producing guidance on safe working practice	Not directly	Welsh Government	Dylan Owen	October 2025 - April 2026	Yellow	Task			A scoping exercise / short research paper on the policy used in England has been completed. On 18.11.25, staff from Education, Safeguarding (Children and Adults) and Human Resources met to consider what Gwynedd could implement while awaiting clarification from the Welsh Government. Due to concerns about: 1. The limited value of a Gwynedd-only approach when staff frequently work across the North and Mid Wales region, 2. data management implications, and 3. HR and fair work issues, including the absence of a statutory definition of "low-level concerns", The decision was made to delay implementing a Low-Level Concerns Policy until national guidance is issued by the Welsh Government.	Whilst Welsh Government are reviewing the recommendation, the Council will review the pre-2019 central list and explore how we can reintroduce the practice of sending Part 5 information to HR, ensuring it is checked and incorporated into employment processes.		
15	CPR - 12		Theme 2 - Managing Allegations and Concerns about Adults working with Children	It is a requirement that thresholds for invoking the procedures are decided at a multi-agency meeting and not solely by the LADO, and take into consideration previous concerns, complaints and allegations	Ensure that multi-agency discussions take place to assess thresholds for any concerns involving individuals in positions of trust	Yes	Welsh Government	Dylan Owen / Sharron Carter	Tbc	Yellow	Ongoing			Possible resource implication - a corporate bid is under consideration	Currently, the Children's Department ensures that referrals are screened by the IAA and discussions take place with either the LADO or the DOS as to the need to instigate Part 5 procedures. Our strategy discussion and meeting templates have already been amended as to ensure that any and all previous information is captured and shared.	The Children's Department will also engage with North Wales Police to explore the practicalities of implementing the requirement to hold multi agency meeting when making decisions in relation to instigating part 5 procedures. This will include considering arrangements such as regular scheduled meetings to ensure effective communication and coordination. The Department will also assess whether additional resources or staffing will be necessary to support these changes and maintain compliance. Conversation is anticipated on this matter and viability across the region at the December NWSB. A further meeting is planned with Adult Services to consider wider implications for such threshold decision making.	
		15.1	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	Green	Ongoing						

				While the Government is considering implementing this recommendation, Children's Services will pilot a process for referrals concerning individuals in a position of trust. The Children's Department will reach out to the North Wales Police Service to consider the practicalities of doing this.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Sharron Carter	November 2025	Task						
		15.2 "		Determine any resources required to facilitate the successful implementation of this action. Department Heads and Director to discuss a corporate bid.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Dylan Owen / Sharron Carter	November 2025	Task						
		15.3 "		The NWSB Regional Delivery group has noted that audits will be undertaken to ensure compliance with this requirement and that National Section 5 training will be delivered to support LADOs.	Yes	Regional Safeguarding Board	Dylan Owen	?	Ongoing						
		15.5 "		Review the procedure in view of any further recommendations or guidance from Welsh Government on the matter in the future	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Sharron Carter	Ongoing	Ongoing						
16	CPR - 5	Theme 2 - Managing Allegations and Concerns about Adults working with Children	When a referral is made under Wales Safeguarding Procedures Section 5, all safeguarding information on the child's records on the data management system must be taken into consideration when assessing risk and vulnerability	Ensure that, when a referral is made under Wales Safeguarding Procedures – Section 5, all existing safeguarding information held on the child's record is reviewed when assessing risk and vulnerability	Yes	All organisations	Dylan Owen	September 2025	Task	yes			Practice now involves consideration of previous referrals. An internal audit was undertaken to review past referrals to ensure appropriate consideration had been given.	Keep in mind any regional and / or national developments through the NWSB.	
		16.1 "		Adapt the Part 5 discussions forms and the Part 5 Strategy meeting forms, in order to ensure that this check information is recorded from now on. This change will also act as a reminder to other attendees of Part 5 meetings – such as representatives from the education or human resources field – to check relevant background information and records.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Sharron Carter	September 2025	Task	yes					
17	NEW-2	Theme 2 - Managing Allegations and Concerns about Adults working with Children	Too much emphasis on criminal threshold, need more consideration of "suitability to work with children"		Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Sharron Carter	Ongoing	Ongoing		YES	Yes - employ additional DOS who will also lead on the Audit Framework for the Department		Assessing thresholds will form part of the audit work that the Department will be putting in place. The intention is to recruit an individual, funded by the Welsh Government (via the Head of Education), who will operate as the Designated Officer for Safeguarding (DOS) and will also be responsible for developing an audit plan across the Department.	
18	NEW-3	Theme 2 - Managing Allegations and Concerns about Adults working with Children	Ensure other LAs are invited to part 5 strategy discussions and meetings if it relates to a child in their area		Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Sharron Carter	Ongoing	Ongoing		YES	Yes - employ additional DOS who will also lead on the Audit Framework for the Department		Looking at who is invited and who participates in Strategy discussions will form part of the audit work that the Department will be putting in place. The intention is to recruit an individual, funded by the Welsh Government (via the Head of Education), who will operate as the Designated Officer for Safeguarding (DOS) and will also be responsible for developing an audit plan across the Department.	
19	NEW-4	Theme 2 - Managing Allegations and Concerns about Adults working with Children	Ensuring the referral form is easily accessible and not difficult to fill in	Ensure the referral form is easy to find and simple to complete, removing any barriers to access.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Dylan Owen	Tbc	Task		YES	IT Department capacity to undertake work	In the short term, the form has been added to the website under Child Abuse, Children and Family Support, and Keeping Pupils Safe. An email has also been sent to all Gwynedd school headteachers with the form attached as a reminder.	Work with the IT department to develop a digital version of the form so that users no longer need to download a PDF and send through an email; the information will be submitted and sent automatically through the website. To note that the form is a regional document and there are currently plans to adopt a nationwide single referral form.	
		19.1 "		Make the form is easy to find under Child Abuse, Children and Supporting Families and Keeping Pupils Safe on the Council Website.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Sharron Carter	November 2025	Task						
		19.2 "		Email all Gwynedd school Headteachers raising awareness of the revised form	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Sharron Carter	November 2025	Task						
		19.3 "		Work with the IT department to develop a digital version of the form so that users no longer need to download a PDF and send through an email; the information will be submitted and sent automatically through the website	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Sharron Carter	Tbc	Task						
20	NEW - 5	Theme 2 - Managing Allegations and Concerns about Adults working with Children	Ensure transparent and open culture when dealing with referrals - being open to information over the phone		Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Dylan Owen / Sharron Carter	Ongoing	Ongoing		No		The Department is available to provide advice and to receive referrals over the phone. There are also professional and ethical requirements for individuals raising concerns about a child to record key information so that clear written evidence is available, enabling the Department to act appropriately and accurately.	Part of our ongoing work involves raising awareness across the wider workforce to ensure that everyone understands the correct procedures, for example through training staff on what information needs to be recorded (see ref: RP-C2).	
21	NEW - 6	Theme 2 - Managing Allegations and Concerns about Adults working with Children	Rigidity and lack of flexibility when discussing thresholds		Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Dylan Owen / Sharron Carter	Ongoing	Ongoing		YES		See NEW-2		See NEW-2
22	NEW - 7	Theme 2 - Managing Allegations and Concerns about Adults working with Children	Ensure chair of governors are invited to formal Part 5 Meetings		Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Dylan Owen / Sharron Carter	Ongoing	Ongoing		YES	Yes - employ additional DOS who will also lead on the Audit Framework for the Department	Practice now includes inviting the Governors representative and all other appropriate individuals to the meetings.	Looking at who is invited and who participates in Strategy discussions will form part of the audit work that the Department will be putting in place. The intention is to recruit an individual, funded by the Welsh Government (via the Head of Education), who will operate as the Designated Officer for Safeguarding (DOS) and will also be responsible for developing an audit plan across the Department.	
23	CPR - 10	Theme 2 - Managing Allegations and Concerns about Adults working with Children	The Welsh Government ensures that the revision of the Section 5 procedures is shaped by and takes account of the learning from this Review		No	Welsh Government	Dylan Owen	Tbc	Ongoing					Gwynedd is fully committed to actively participating in the piloting and implementation of any proposed changes. NWSB have noted that discussion are to be held at the Wales Safeguarding Procedures Project Board in Dec 25.	

24	CPR 16		Theme 2 - Managing Allegations and Concerns about Adults working with Children	The new Welsh Government Strategy (10-year Strategy 2025–2035 for the prevention of child sexual abuse (which builds on the National Action Plan for Preventing and Responding to CSA, July 2019) is stress-tested against the findings of this review and that any learning is incorporated into the new strategy		No	Welsh Government	Dylan Owen	Tbc	 	Ongoing				The Council has already responded to the consultation and have noted that learning it is essential that the Welsh Government's Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Strategy 2025–2035, is rigorously tested against the findings of the CPR. The strategy must consider the local learning in order to ensure meaningful improvements in practice.	Awaiting an update from the Welsh Government.
25	RP- B2		Theme 2 - Managing Allegations and Concerns about Adults working with Children	Restructuring and establishment of the Gwynedd Schools Safeguarding and Well-being Service.	Service continues to review if the structure is fit for purpose.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Gwern ap Rhisiart	Ongoing	 	Completed	yes			Restructuring has already taken place. 11/03/2025 - Reported at the meeting that the re-structuring of Education Services in order to establish the Gwynedd Schools Safeguarding and Well-being Service has been completed. This introduces capacity to check the quality of school arrangements annually along with durability in terms of staffing. 20/11/25 - The service has advertised for a 4th member of the team. 9 have applied, there will be appointment before the end of this term. The service is now a team of 3, one manager and two officers, who are able to work as a team in order to respond promptly to requests for advice and support.	The service continues to review its structure to ensure it remains fit for purpose, identifying any areas that may need adjustment to meet current and future demands. We will add a 4th member to the team before the end of term.
26	NEW- 8		Theme 2 - Managing Allegations and Concerns about Adults working with Children	Ensuring better working relationship with Schools so that there isn't a perception that referring is troublesome/rejecting referrals		Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Gwern ap Rhisiart / Dylan Owen	Ongoing	 	Ongoing			No	Team managers already meet regularly with headteachers, and scheduled arrangements are in place for schools that request them. It was previously standard practice for the Head and Deputy Head of the Children's Department to attend school headteacher forums occasionally - this practice needs to continue.	Maintain the current practice of regular meetings between headteachers and team managers, and participation in headteacher forums.
27	NEW- 9		Theme 2 - Managing Allegations and Concerns about Adults working with Children	Ensure better communication/co-ordination between education and children departments		Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Sharron Carter / Gwern ap Rhisiart	Ongoing	 	Ongoing			No	The Well-being and Safeguarding Team is currently meeting with operational management teams to ensure a better understanding of roles. In addition, the Virtual Head for Children in Care role ensures that consistent contact is maintained with Children's Services and the Education Department is key to the successful implementation of the "No Wrong Door" Policy.	Put in place arrangements for joint regular Manager Meetings to be held periodically (e.g., quarterly) in order to strengthen collaboration between the two Departments.
28	NEW- 10		Theme 2 - Managing Allegations and Concerns about Adults working with Children	Ensure clear recording of Strategy Discussions and clarification around decisions made at these meetings		Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Sharron Carter	Ongoing	 	Ongoing	YES	Yes - employ additional DOS who will also lead on the Audit Framework for the Department.		Looking at the quality of recording Strategy discussions will form part of the audit work that the Department will be putting in place. The intention is to recruit an individual, funded by the Welsh Government (via the Head of Education), who will operate as the Designated Officer for Safeguarding (DOS) and will also be responsible for developing an audit plan across the Department.	

Theme 3 - Training and Policies

No	Ref	Task Ref	Theme	Recommendation / Objective	Action	Can CG take action:	Relevant to:	Responsibility - Cyngor Gwynedd	Timescale	RAG	Task / Ongoing	Task Completed	Measure	Resources	What has already changed?	What still needs to be done?
29	CPR - 17		Theme 3 - Training and Policies	Welsh Government commission a training resource based on the findings of this Review for use by all schools in Wales. This should be adaptable for use by other agencies working with children		No	Welsh Government	Gwern ap Rhisiart	tbc by WG	Yellow	Ongoing					The Council fully supports this recommendation and is keen to implement or pilot such training, once the Welsh Government has considered the matter.
30	CPR - 18		Theme 3 - Training and Policies	All school staff, volunteers (including administrative and facilities) and Governors receive training on the modus operandi of sex offenders and sex offender grooming using the Finkelhor model	Ensure that all school staff, volunteers (including admin and facilities staff), and Governors receive training on how sex offenders operate and groom, using the Finkelhor model.	Yes	All Schools	Gwern ap Rhisiart	tbc	Yellow	Ongoing				This training will need to be developed. There isn't a recognised training provision for this, what's included in the current school training pack has been provided by the NSPCC and isn't sufficient to address the finding in the report.	
31	CPR - 19	30.1 "	Theme 3 - Training and Policies	The safeguarding Boards are assured that this training is delivered to Local Authority personnel in Education, Children's Services and Human Resources who lead on or respond to the management of concerns about adults working with children	Safeguarding Boards should be assured that all school staff, volunteers (including admin and facilities staff), HR staff and Governors receive training on how sex offenders operate and groom	Yes	Regional Safeguarding Board	Gwern ap Rhisiart / Dylan Owen / Ian Jones	tbc (see CPR-18)	Yellow	Ongoing	YES	Yes?	(see CPR-18)	(see CPR-18)	
		31.1 "														
32	CPR - 20		Theme 3 - Training and Policies	The Safeguarding Board is assured that all Local Authorities have clear Whistleblowing policies which are publicised and can be used safely by all staff	Cyngor Gwynedd's Whistleblowing policy is clearly communicated and can be used safely by all staff.	Yes	Regional Safeguarding Board	Ian Jones	April 2026	Yellow	Ongoing		Yes	?	Whistleblowing Policy is already in place and the Council has carried out an Internal Audit on the awareness of it in June 2024. A Task and Finish Group was established in July 2025 and there is a work program in place to review the Corporate 'Whistleblowing' Policy and the Schools Model Policy. This includes inviting external experts (PROTECT) to give an opinion and ensure that the policy is fit for purpose and carrying out a consultation process with the Unions. An amended policy has been drafted and circulated for review with the aim of presenting it to Cabinet for approval February 2026. The Task and Finish group have made a comparison with the Welsh Government policy in terms of schools and at the moment do not consider it necessary to introduce the new policy to Gwynedd schools. Instead, it is recommend that all schools move to adopt the Government's policy as soon as possible.	- Receive approval and adopt the new Policy - Commissioning a new recording and monitoring system for implementing the Policy - Programme to raise awareness and carry out training for Heads of Department, Assistant Heads, Managers, Team Leaders and staff N45
		32.1 "		Internal audit of staff awareness of Whistleblowing Policy	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Ian Jones	June 2025	Grey	Task	yes				Completed	
		32.2 "		Establish Task and Finish Group	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Ian Jones	July 2025	Grey	Task	yes				Completed	
		32.3 "		T&F to review of the Corporate 'Whistleblowing' Policy and the Schools Model Policy. This includes inviting external experts (PROTECT) to give an opinion and ensure that the policy is fit for purpose and carry out a consultation process with the Unions.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Ian Jones	End of November 2025	Grey	Task	yes				Draft completed and circulated for review	
		32.4 "		Present to Cabinet to receive approval of the new Policy	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Ian Jones	January 2026	Green	Task						
		32.5 "		Present to the Full Council to adopt the amended Policy.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Ian Jones	5 March 2025	Green	Task	no					
		32.6 "		Commission a new recording and monitoring system for implementing the Policy	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Ian Jones	End of January 2026	Green	Task	no				In progress	
		32.7 "		Programme to raise awareness and carry out training for Heads of Department, Assistant Heads, Managers, Team Leaders and staff	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Ian Jones	January - April, 2026	Green	Task / Ongoing	no	YES	Yes			
		32.8 "		Review the effectiveness of the policy every 3 years	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Ian Jones	December 2028	Green	Ongoing	no					
		32.9 "		All schools move to adopt the Government's policy as soon as possible. Raising awareness and training.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Gwern ap Rhisiart		Yellow	Ongoing		YES				
33	CPR-13		Theme 3 - Training and Policies	Safeguarding Boards receive assurance that LADOs in their area have regular training and supervision		No	Regional Safeguarding Board	Dylan Owen	Tbc	Yellow	Ongoing					Awaiting confirmation of what is needed. The NWSB Workforce Development and Safeguarding Training subgroup will request updates in relation to compliance on this action.

34	CPR - 24	Theme 3 - Training and Policies	The Welsh Government initiates a review of the Governance arrangements in schools in Wales which: Ensures that Designated Safeguarding Persons and their deputies receive external supervision from qualified Social Workers from the relevant local authority	Ensure that Designated Safeguarding Persons and their deputies receive external supervision from qualified Social Workers.	?	Welsh Government	Gwern ap Rhisiart / Dylan Owen	Tbc	Ongoing	YES	With almost 100 Designated Safeguarding Persons in schools (not including deputy DSP's), additional resources will be needed to implement this recommendation effectively.	The Safeguarding and Well-being Team within the Education Department provides information, advice and support to the Designated Safeguarding Persons in schools across Gwynedd. This arrangement is unique to the county and the Team Manager is in constant contact with the Gwynedd child protection team. If the Designated Safeguarding Persons express a desire for more special supervision, this could be arranged as necessary.	With almost a hundred designated persons in schools, it will be necessary to secure additional resources to implement this recommendation effectively. This recommendation is anticipated to be discussed at the NWSB in December and potentially be referred up to the national safeguarding board.	
35	RP- C2	Theme 3 - Training and Policies	Barrister's Report - Recommendation C1: Introduce additional training for staff regarding record keeping procedures and ensure that staff are trained to an adequate standard	Add additional safeguarding record-keeping training to the existing e-module.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Ian Jones/Dylan Owen	December 2025	Task	?	The assessment of options for delivering this training has been completed. A key limitation is that we cannot alter the core model ourselves, as it is a standard national Social Care Wales training module. It was initially thought that we could add information to the "landing page", but after reviewing it and considering that this content would appear before even the most basic training content this approach was deemed inappropriate. We have now contacted Social Care Wales to ask if we can include an extra slide to the Gwynedd training.	A draft of the wording / training information is in place, but following feedback it now needs to be revised.	Refine and finalise the training wording. Await a response from Social Care Wales to determine how the training delivered in Gwynedd can be adapted.	
36	RP- B1b	Theme 3 - Training and Policies	35.1 "	Assess the options for updating or revising the e-module.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Ian Jones	September 2025	yes					
			35.2 "	Contact Social Care Wales – awaiting confirmation of their response.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Dylan Owen	November 2025	yes					
			35.3 "	Draft wording shared with safeguarding and training staff for feedback.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Dylan Owen	November 2026	yes					
			35.4 "	Refine and finalise the wording.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Dylan Owen	December 2025	yes					
			35.5 "	Include safeguarding record-keeping training to the existing e-module.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Dylan Owen	tbc	yes					
			The Safeguarding Executive Group scrutinises the levels of safeguarding training and VAWDASV in each Department and reports to the Corporate Safeguarding Strategic Panel on a quarterly basis;	The Safeguarding Executive Group scrutinises the levels of safeguarding training and VAWDASV in each Department and reports to the Corporate Safeguarding Strategic Panel on a quarterly basis;	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Ian Jones/Dylan Owen	Ongoing	Ongoing	YES	The Safeguarding Champion (Hyrwyddwr Diogelu) role was funded through a corporate bid.	There is significant scope to increase the number of Council staff who have completed safeguarding and VAWDASV training. The Safeguarding Champion role was established in September 2025, with the appointed individual taking up the post in early November 2025. The Safeguarding Champion also works closely with the Safeguarding Panel and the Operational Group.	Create a Sub-Group under the Safeguarding Operational Group to develop and oversee a clear communication plan for all Council staff. The Sub-Group will also produce practical tools to reinforce and promote the importance of safeguarding training across the Council.	
			36.1 "	Issue reminders to all Heads of Department to ensure that staff complete the mandatory safeguarding training.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Ian Jones/Dylan Owen	August 2025	Task	yes				
37	RP- B2	Theme 3 - Training and Policies	36.2 "	Ensure that each department's performance dashboard reports the percentage of staff who have completed Safeguarding and VAWDASV training.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Ian Jones/Dylan Owen	October 2025	Task	yes				
			36.3 "	Appointment of Safeguarding Champion role to promote and raise awareness	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Ian Jones/Dylan Owen	October 2025	Task	yes				
			36.4 "	Create a Sub-Group under the Safeguarding Operational Group to develop and oversee a clear communication plan for all Council staff, ensuring it meets the needs of frontline teams.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Dylan Owen	November 2025	Task					
			36.5 "	Develop and produce practical tools to reinforce and promote the importance of safeguarding training across the Council (via Sub-group)	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Ian Jones/Dylan Owen	tbc	Task		Depending on sub-group recommendations			
			36.6 "	Regularly monitor the percentage of staff who have completed the mandatory Safeguarding and VAWDASV training.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Dylan Owen	Ongoing	Ongoing	Yes	December 2025 - Number of individuals who have completed Safeguarding - 75.9% (Sept - 73.5%) / Number of individuals who have completed Domestic Abuse - 72.8% (Sept - 71.1%)			
			Support and advice for schools on safeguarding arrangements including policy, training and safeguarding monitoring arrangements	Ongoing review of school safeguarding training package	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Gwern ap Rhisiart	Completed	Ongoing	yes	Additional resources are needed to ensure that the team can visit all schools. This has been provided through WG grant.	11/03/25: Schools Training Pack updated. This is something that used to happen but a specific part of the package presented this year has been on "grooming" at the request of schools (see CPR-3)	Self-evaluation and monitoring arrangements in place. Annual visits are carried out by the Safeguarding and Well-being team. We wish to improve the self evaluation process completed by schools. This will better inform us of the issues that need addressing by us and help us to measure impact.	
													We intend to strengthen the way schools evaluate safeguarding and use this information to better inform us of the impact of our work to support them.	

38	RP- C2d	Theme 3 - Training and Policies	Barrister's Report - Recommendation D: Ensure that all staff who may be involved in making safeguarding decisions have completed a mandatory minimum level of safeguarding training		Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Ian Jones							75.9% of all Council staff have now completed the e-learning module. An individual has now been appointed to the position of Safeguarding Champion Recruitment and Selection Policy has been amended to reflect Mandatory Training on commencement of employment	Work to be done on email accounts for staff (particularly frontline) to enable them to complete mandatory training. Submit a bid for significant funding in order to improve that during the Council's bid cycle for 2026/27 and onwards.
39	38.1 "	Theme 3 - Training and Policies	Stage 1 - Data Correction - substantial data cleaning and correction work is underway in order to give a full picture of the Council's reach.		Cyngor Gwynedd	Ian Jones	End of October, 2025	Ongoing							
40	RP- B1	Theme 3 - Training and Policies	Periodic review of Cyngor Gwynedd's Corporate Safeguarding Policy	Review Corporate Safeguarding Policy	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Dylan Owen	April 2026	Ongoing					The Corporate Safeguarding Policy was reviewed in the second half of 2023 and adopted by the Cabinet in February 2024, with Full Council approval in March 2024. The Policy is subject to ongoing review every two years. As part of the Strategic Safeguarding work, an updated report will be presented to Full Council in 2026.	This has been added as an agenda item for the January 2026 Safeguarding Panel meeting. It is scheduled for publication in spring 2026.
41	RP- B2	Theme 3 - Training and Policies	Periodic review of School Safeguarding Policy and review of procedures to highlight where individual schools have significantly modified the content of exemplary policies			Cyngor Gwynedd	Gwern ap Rhisiart		Ongoing	yes			Additional resources are needed to ensure that the team can visit all schools. This has been provided through WG grant.	We review the policy every year during the summer. We now review the policy continually and will update schools on any change in year.	Continue to look at good practice across Wales in terms of policy.
42	RP- B1a	Theme 3 - Training and Policies	An internal audit of Gwynedd Council's workforce awareness of safeguarding arrangements ;			Cyngor Gwynedd	Dylan Owen	June 2026	Ongoing					Internal audit completed June 2025 and reported to the Safeguarding Strategic Panel. It is intended to repeat this audit annually. Following the audit suggestion - appointment of Corporate Safeguarding Champion to promote awareness of the policy and procedures and to promote the training. Full report presented at the last meeting of the Response Board (15/09/25)	Repeat internal audit - June 2026.
43	RP- B1c	Theme 3 - Training and Policies	Safeguarding Executive Group scrutinising workforce percentages in each Department of the Council who have a current DBS, where necessary and reporting to the Corporate Safeguarding Strategic Panel on a quarterly basis.	Monitor departmental DBS compliance and report quarterly to the Corporate Safeguarding Strategic Panel.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Dylan Owen	Completed	Ongoing		Yes			The DBS compliance rates across departments are very high. Most are at 100%, with a few around 99.5% (typically due to staff on maternity leave or long-term absence). This is regularly monitored as a standing agenda item at Safeguarding Executive Group meetings, and each department's designated safeguarding lead is responsible for tracking their own figures.	These statistics be incorporated into the Response Board's future performance measures.
44	RP- B5	Theme 3 - Training and Policies	Visits to monitor and support safeguarding arrangements for individual schools annually	Visits to monitor and support safeguarding arrangements for individual schools annually	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Gwern ap Rhisiart	Completed	Ongoing		YES			All schools have received a Monitoring Visit within the past two years, and an annual visiting schedule will operate from January 2025 onwards. Of the 45 schools visited up to July, 43 meet safeguarding requirements well or better. Two schools required a second visit or additional support to address specific matters such as attendance/absence recording and displaying safeguarding posters. Both schools now receive regular supportive visits to ensure actions are implemented. An update was reported at the Response Board meeting on 20/10/2025.	Annual monitoring procedure in place. An ongoing issue which will be addressed in the measures presented to the Response Board and the Education Department's performance challenge meetings.
45	RP- B6	Theme 3 - Training and Policies	Scrutiny inspection of safeguarding arrangements		Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Scrutiny Officer or representative of the Scrutiny Investigation - awaiting confirmation	December 2025	Task				Yes - external provider	A Scrutiny investigation into safeguarding arrangements within Gwynedd schools is underway. An update was given to the Board 30/06/2025	Expected to report to the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee in December 2025 but this has slipped to 12 February 2026 - this is due to process of procuring and appointing external provider to undertake research on voice of the child. Intention to return to present to the Board once completed.

Theme 4 - Governance of Schools

No	Ref	Task ref	Theme	Recommendation / Objective	Can CG take action:	Relevant to:	Responsibility - Cyngor Gwynedd	Timescale	RAG	Task / Ongoing	Task Completed	Measure	Resources	What has already changed?	What still needs to be done?
46	CPR - 21		Theme 4 - Governance of Schools	<p>The Welsh Government initiates a review of the Governance arrangements in schools in Wales which:</p> <p>Clearly delineates Governor responsibilities to bring about a shift from a primary focus on financial management and results to one where safeguarding, health and wellbeing are seen as the proper foundation for learning and success</p>	Yes	Welsh Government	Gwern ap Rhisiart	This will take between 6 and 9 months according to WG.						Unfortunately, the consultation on governance arrangements in schools (referred to in the recommendation) has not addressed some of the issues as expected. We are aware that the Welsh Government intends to look more closely at this area soon, and we are supportive of that endeavour.	Education Department will develop and circulate a fixed agenda / program for the governing bodies of Gwynedd schools, which will focus on safeguarding and welfare issues, together with providing the appropriate data to help them assess the schools' situation (e.g. the number of exclusions).
		46.1 "		Develop a program for the governing bodies of schools in Gwynedd which focus on safeguarding and welfare issues			Gwern ap Rhisiart			Ongoing				We already provide mandatory safeguarding training for all Chairs and Designated Governor for Safeguarding. We have also made it mandatory for all Governors to complete basic safeguarding training. We also ensure that all Governors have a DBS. We have created a new Governor Handbook and this has been shared with all Governors.	We need to create a time table of tasks over the course of a year that would ensure that scrutiny is given to all aspects of safeguarding. Work hasn't started on this as of yet.
		46.2 "		Ensure appropriate data is shared to help assess the school's situation including wider health and culture			Gwern ap Rhisiart			Ongoing				We have started to collate the information needed to enable this to happen, all schools have agreed to share their data. We have faced technical issues but are working to create a school on a page site that would enable Governors to view school performance against a range of data including the once referred to in the recommendation.	Raise awareness among Chairs of Governors of the policy and responsibility.
		46.3 "		Feedback to ensure the program is reviewed on a regular basis in line with Welsh Government requirements.			Gwern ap Rhisiart								
47	CPR - 22		Theme 4 - Governance of Schools	<p>The Welsh Government initiates a review of the Governance arrangements in schools in Wales which:</p> <p>Supports the development and implementation of an easy-to-read dashboard of basic metrics to provide a measure of the wider health and culture of the school.</p>	Yes	Welsh Government	Gwern ap Rhisiart	No time scale has been provided.					We will need resources to create a dashboard that would facilitate the collection of such data.	See explanation in 50 - CPR-21	Cyngor Gwynedd will provide the appropriate data to the governing bodies.
48	CPR - 23		Theme 4 - Governance of Schools	<p>The Welsh Government initiates a review of the Governance arrangements in schools in Wales which:</p> <p>Requires Governing Bodies to keep accurate records of decisions made regarding safeguarding matters which are reported to the Local Authority in particular where a decision has been made which does not follow Local Authority guidance</p>		Welsh Government	Gwern ap Rhisiart							It is believed that the Government should consider strengthening this clause in order to ensure that the Local Authority gets the final decision in cases relating to prevention or action in safeguarding matters. At the moment, the decision to suspend has been allocated to the chair of governors, which raises some concerns in terms of clarity and responsibility.	
49	RP- C3		Theme 4 - Governance of Schools	To adopt recommendations from review into the ICP report when dealing with complaints in the future		Cyngor Gwynedd	Gwern ap Rhisiart		Green	Ongoing		No		<i>There has not been another similar case in Gwynedd since this ICP but if another case arises in the future (in any school) we will reinforce the message that being open and proactive from the start is essential if we want to respond appropriately.</i>	<i>It is not possible to give a specific completion date on this action - only a commitment to correctly implement independent complaints reports in the future.</i>

50	RP- Ch7		Theme 4 - Governance of Schools	<i>Continue to offer the best possible training and support to the Governors, this is part of the work to reform the Body.</i>		Cyngor Gwynedd	Gwern ap Rhisiart			Ongoing			We will need an additional officer to support 94 governing bodies. Currently we have one officer. We have received a grant from WG that will allow us to appoint an additional officer.	Letter sent to Welsh Government requesting a national discussion on the suitability of the current system and the burden placed on Governors. Governors training offer is shared every September. In the meantime Governors can ask through the Clerk for any training that would help them. No change to report since the last meeting but support continues. We have continued our support for the Governing Body at Friars following publishing the CPR report.	Await the outcome of WG review into school governance arrangements and implement any recommendations that follow.
51	RP- Ch6		Theme 4 - Governance of Schools	<i>The Governing Body of the School and the Department of Education to carry out an investigation in order to compare the operating arrangements of Ysgol Friars with other schools in the County.</i>		Cyngor Gwynedd	Gwern ap Rhisiart	May 2026		Task			We will need resources if there is an intention to commission an independant review.	The school's arrangements are now closely aligned with those of the rest of Gwynedd's schools.	When appropriate in terms of pressure on the school and Governing Body, commission an independent review of operating arragment at Ysgol Friars.
52	NEW- 12		Theme 4 - Governance of Schools	<i>Clarity around investigation and suspension arrangements for staff in schools - role of Chair of Governors in the process</i>		Cyngor Gwynedd	Gwern ap Rhisiart			Ongoing		No	<i>Policies are already in place, developed ond a regional basis, that ensure that the process of suspending staff at all levels are clear. The Chair of Governors has the delegated power to suspend a Headteacher. There will be support from HR and education officer to do so. There is a risk assessment that must be completed before a member of staff is suspended.</i>	<i>Raise awarness among Chairs of Governors of the policy and responsibility.</i>	

Theme 5 - Restrictive practices

No	Ref	Task ref	Theme	Recommendation / Objective	Action	Can CG take action:	Relevant to:	Responsibility - Cyngor Gwynedd	Timescale	RAG	Task / Ongoing	Task Completed	Measure	Resources	What has already changed?	What still needs to be done?	
53	CPR - 25		Theme 5 - Restrictive practices	The Welsh Government issues an addendum to the guidance on Reducing Restrictive Practices Framework 2022 around the filming of incidents by adults, and on the appropriate retention of such filmed records			Welsh Government	Gwern ap Rhisiart							Perpetrator acted contrary to the Schools Policy by filming cases - this is not standard practice. During QA visits we always look at the restrictive practice policy to ensure that is coincides with the model policy provided. Training is provided for free through the inclusion team.	Need to hold an internal discussion on the use of reasonable force, especially as there are currently two types of training available that teach different techniques. Education Department have specialist who are trained in CPD field and therefore harmonizing the training methods would be a good starting point to ensure a clear, consistent and safe approach across the services.	
		53.1	"	<i>Establish a sub-group to look into best practice and how best to respond to the recommendation (CPR-25)</i>		Cyngor Gwynedd	Gwern ap Rhisiart	<i>December 2025</i>		Green	Task						
		53.2	"	<i>Review the Council's Restrictive Practices policy</i>		Cyngor Gwynedd	Gwern ap Rhisiart	<i>tbc</i>		Green	Task						
		53.3	"	<i>Ensure that all schools adopt the new model policy and do not act contrary to it</i>		Cyngor Gwynedd	Gwern ap Rhisiart	<i>tbc</i>		Green	Task						
		53.4	"	<i>Provide training to support the new policy</i>		Cyngor Gwynedd	Gwern ap Rhisiart	<i>tbc</i>		Green	Task / Ongoing						
		53.5	"	<i>Monitor schools' use of the policy and continue to review the policy to ensure good practice</i>		Cyngor Gwynedd	Gwern ap Rhisiart	<i>tbc</i>		Green	Ongoing						

Theme 6 - Crisis Planning and Crisis Response

No	Ref	Task ref	Theme	Recommendation / Objective	Action	Can CG take action:	Relevant to:	Responsibility - Cyngor Gwynedd	Timescale	RAG	Task / Ongoing	Task Completed	Measure	Resources	What has already changed?	What still needs to be done?	
54	CPR - 26a		Theme 6 - Crisis Planning and Crisis Response	Welsh Government is assured that all Local Authorities have in place a strategic critical incident plan which sets out the mechanism for an immediate and coordinated multi-agency response a. The plan sets out arrangements for victim care, securing evidence and managing the alleged offender	An internal task group set up to review current plans in place at strategic and operational level to respond to critical incidents. The work will draw on good practice regionally and nationally		Welsh Government / All Local Authorities	Catrin Love	Draft plan by 31/12/25	Yellow	Task				An internal task group set up to review current plans in place at strategic and operational level to respond to critical incidents. The work will draw on good practice regionally and nationally	Once plan is agreed, there will need to be a programme of implementation and training in the Spring of 2026	
		54.1	"		Collate best practice examples from across Wales and beyond.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Catrin Love	w/b 1/12/25	Yellow	Task				Task group consisting of Health and Safety Officer and Emergency Planning Officer along with Assistant Head of Department and Regional Emergency Planning manager as required	Contact has been made with resilience partners to collate plans and establish best practice	Consider the contents of received material alongside of best practice and working arrangements in Gwynedd so as to draft an Emergency / Crisis Plan
		54.2	"		Present draft template to Response Board for final approval	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Catrin Love	January 2026	Yellow	Task						
		54.3	"		Implement a swift and robust training programme so that all key stakeholders are made aware of the plan and receive training as appropriate on how to implement it on their sites.	Yes	Cyngor Gwynedd	Catrin Love	Feb - June 2026	Yellow	Task						
55	CPR - 26b		Theme 6 - Crisis Planning and Crisis Response	Welsh Government is assured that all Local Authorities have in place a strategic critical incident plan which sets out the mechanism for an immediate and coordinated multi-agency response b. The plan includes a formal protocol for information sharing with other Local Authorities which might be impacted	The plan will be drafted in conjunction with resilience partners across North Wales and include a formal protocol for sharing information		Welsh Government / All Local Authorities	Catrin Love		Yellow	Task						
56	CPR - 26c		Theme 6 - Crisis Planning and Crisis Response	Welsh Government is assured that all Local Authorities have in place a strategic critical incident plan which sets out the mechanism for an immediate and coordinated multi-agency response c. There is a strategic plan to locate accessible on-site support for both children and adults in organisations where there has been a significant traumatic incident	Research swift on-site support actions for both children and adults and outline contact details clearly in the plan.		Welsh Government / All Local Authorities	Catrin Love	January 2026	Yellow	Task						
57	CPR - 26d		Theme 6 - Crisis Planning and Crisis Response	Welsh Government is assured that all Local Authorities have in place a strategic critical incident plan which sets out the mechanism for an immediate and coordinated multi-agency response d. In a critical incident of this nature consideration is given to seconding a social worker to work with the police investigation team to ensure that evidence and information are viewed through a safeguarding as well as criminal lens	Discuss possibilities and mechanism to put this into practice.		Welsh Government / All Local Authorities	Catrin Love	April 2026	Yellow	Task						
58	PR- C2e		Theme 6 - Crisis Planning and Crisis Response	Barrister's Report - Recommendation E: Publish guidelines for staff regarding the circumstances where it is necessary/proportionate to share information with the school's Governing Body	Guidelines for the Governing Body (Safeguarding Policy)		Cyngor Gwynedd	Gwern ap Rhisiart	Completed	Grey	Ongoing				The arrangements in this area have already changed since 2019 and this information is now in the Safeguarding Policy of individual schools and the information presented to staff.	The Education Department will check to ensure that staff in schools are aware of this and if the understanding is not sufficient we will go about ensuring that everyone understands clearly.	

Theme 7 - Ysgol Friars - Governance

No	Ref	Task ref	Theme	Recommendation / Objective	Action	Can CG take action:	Relevant to:	Responsibility - Cyngor Gwynedd	Timescale	RAG	Task / Ongoing	Task Completed	Measure	Resources	What has already changed?	What still needs to be done?
59			7.1 - Ysgol Friars - Governance	Continue to clerk the Governing Body until sustainable arrangements are in place. More sustainable options will have to be considered as an existing arrangement cannot continue for an extended period.			Cyngor Gwynedd									
59	NEW	59.1			Current clerk to work closely with the Project Manager from September onwards.		Margaret Davies / Governing Body	September – October 2025	Green	Ongoing				Project lead time	Project lead now in post and working closely with the clerk	School to appoint their own clerk
		59.2			Governing Body agrees to advertise post following October half term with hope of starting in January.		Margaret Davies	October 2025	Green	Ongoing					First advert out however applicant no show at interview	Re-advertise positon immediately
		59.3			Training and support for the new clerk during the first two terms from the Local Authority.		Buddug Mair	July 2026	Red	Ongoing				Re-advertise	Continue to try to appoint a clerk	
60	NEW		7.1 - Ysgol Friars - Governance	Review the Governing Body's ability to implement the recommendations that will result from the CPR, realistically assessing what steps are beyond its capacity.			Cyngor Gwynedd									
		60.1			The Authority's Safeguarding Officer will attend the governing body / welfare sub-committee meetings for the next year in order to provide constructive support and challenge, ensure regular feedback to the Authority regarding progress against the recommendations, and strengthen the working relationship between the school and the Authority during this period.		Cyngor Gwynedd	Gwern ap Rhisiart	September 2025- July 2026	Green	Ongoing				Safeguarding lead meets with HT/ DSL every three weeks and attends GB meetings. Audit due 21 November	This level of support needs to continue currently
61	NEW		7.1 - Ysgol Friars - Governance	Strengthen training and support for governors in the areas of safeguarding, strategic accountability, and performance monitoring.			Cyngor Gwynedd									
		61.1			Governors have been invited to join the Sept. 2nd School safeguarding training if possible.		Margaret Davies	2 September 2025	Grey	Yellow	Yes				2 governors attended	All governors due to complete NSPCC training by December 2025,
		61.2			Request for all governors to complete a safeguarding module for governors from the NSPCC by October 2025 (cost to school of the modules).		Margaret Davies	End of Autumn	Green	Ongoing					Agreed and should be completed by December 2025	Special Governing Body meeting due on the 11th December - focus on safeguarding
		61.3			Waiting to hear how compulsory training will change nationally before detailing further.		Gwern ap Rhisiart	Waiting to hear	Grey	Yellow						
62	NEW		7.2 - Ysgol Friars - School Leadership and Management	Support the interim Headteacher, Deputy and the two new Assistant Headteachers as they develop as a strong management team.			Cyngor Gwynedd									
		62.1			Regular SIA visits that focus on the improvement of the School, standards and pedagogy.		Margaret Davies / Gwern ap Rhisiart	Monthly from September onwards	Green	Ongoing					SIA visited during CPR publication and continues to visit as required	ongoing visits during the year to discuss school improvement
		62.2			Safe space half term for all members of the management team by 'trauma informed schools' (cost to the School - MED to organise) - voluntary.		Margaret Davies	October- July	Yellow	Ongoing					This has been organised for January 2025	Sessions organised to support senior staff to support staff during the academic year
		62.3			Monthly supervision of the Designated Person by an external person to support as they settle in the School.		Margaret Davies	October- July	Grey	Yellow	Yes		Cost implication for school	Monthly sessions in place by independent consultant to support DSP	Ongoing support central to support pressures on DSP at this current time	
		62.4			Cross-School collaboration - working with SHO, BE, DO in relation to the Gwynedd and A55 alliance to ensure support from the pastoral side.		Gwynedd Headteachers	September onwards	Green	Ongoing					Formal agreement developed between four schools and first focus is inclusion	Awaiting outcome of funding application for collaboration
		62.5			Re-starting regular meetings between the pastoral side of YF, YT and YDH.		Margaret Davies	September onwards	Red	Yellow					Not in place at this time	Awaiting first inclusion meeting of the year
63	NEW		7.2 - Ysgol Friars - School Leadership and Management	Support the recruitment and transition to a permanent Headteacher during 2026, reassuring staff and parents that robust arrangements are in place			Cyngor Gwynedd									
		63.1			Governors with the support of the Local Authority to lead on this.		Governing Body / Gwern ap Rhisiart	January 2026								
64	NEW		7.2 - Ysgol Friars - School Leadership and Management	Strengthen middle leadership and ensure that school management processes are operational and transparent.			Cyngor Gwynedd									
		64.1			Appoint associate governors for each faculty.		Margaret Davies	September 2025	Green	Ongoing					Associate Governors appointed and first training session to be put in place prior to starting the visits	Visits and feedback from Governors to GB meeting
		64.2			Audit the skills of faculty heads in order to plan relevant training for them.		Margaret Davies	September 2025	Yellow	Ongoing					First cycle of quality assurance completed and school is now revisiting SDP.	All staff need PDR meeting now policy has been ratified
		64.3			Middle/senior management training for individuals who have not had the opportunity to attend. These will be required in both Welsh and English.		Gwern ap Rhisiart	October- Spring 2026	Red	Yellow					awaiting further information from WG following start of new professional learning body	

		64.4			SIA / colleagues from other schools working collaboratively with middle management in quality monitoring including book observations / monitoring.			Margaret Davies / Gwern ap Rhisiart	October- June 2026							First QA cycle has been school based as first in 2 years	feedback from QA cycle to feed into collaborative working
65 NEW		7.3 - Ysgol Friars - Support for Staff and Children	Prioritising pupils' voice and experience through school council / youth forum, regular surveys and safe feedback methods.			Cyngor Gwynedd											
		65.1			Appointment of a designated governor in relation to the pupil's voice.			Margaret Davies / Governing Body	September 2025		Ongoing					governor appointed and ready to attend School Council meetings	Appointed governor needs to attend SC meetings and meet formally with the school council
		65.2			Appoint a lead teacher to co-ordinate the pupil's voice work.			Margaret Davies / Governing Body	September 2025		Ongoing					Appointment made and staff member now co-ordinating the work	continue to work on pupil voice, embed council and develop sub-committees
		65.3			All pupils given opportunity to complete the SHRN and Pass surveys at the start of the academic year and a plan will follow.			Margaret Davies / Governing Body	September 2025			Yes				all pupils offered the opportunity. We will await outcome and build an action plan following results	awaiting results to plan action
		65.4			Setting up year councils			Margaret Davies / Governing Body	November / March / July		Ongoing					School Year Group Councils in place	Impact will need to be monitored - is it making a change
		65.5			Strengthening School Council and sub-committee arrangements.			Margaret Davies / Governing Body	July 2026		Ongoing					School council established and working	Sub-committees need strengthening to include more pupils
		65.6			All faculties have included strengthening the student's voice as part of a development plan - need to monitor the impact of this through link meetings.			Gwern ap Rhisiart / Children's Commissioner	Autumn Term							pupil voice has been a central part of quality assurance processes	Clear plans now being developed by all faculties to respond to pupil feedback
		65.7			Working with the Gwynedd Youth Forum / children's commissioner in developing the skills of the School Council.			Margaret Davies / Governing Body	July 2026		Red					to be developed	
		65.8			Develop pupil voice impact monitoring arrangements as part of the monitoring and quality cycle.			Margaret Davies / Governing Body			Red					to be developed	
66 NEW		7.3 - Ysgol Friars - Support for Staff and Children	Review and strengthen counselling and emotional support arrangements, ensuring sustainable and high quality provision for children and young people.			Cyngor Gwynedd											
		66.1			Assistant headteacher to gain an overview of the counselling system.			Margaret Davies / Governing Body	September 2025							this move has now happened with half termly meetings arranged with senior colleagues to discuss any issues	continue to monitor non-attendance at appointments
		66.2			Review the system of letting children know about the service - SIMS Flag.			Margaret Davies / Governing Body	September 2025		Ongoing					Classcharts now in place as a means of improving communication	tremly evaluations to be in place to support communication
		66.3			Review the use of the wellbeing centre to ensure optimal use is made for the benefit of YF pupils.			Margaret Davies / Governing Body	October 2025							Beneficial meeting with fund holders who has clarified the use for Ysgol Friars pupils	To ensure that Watkin Jones receive a progress report every six months
		66.4			Review the graduated response to support pupils' emotional health and wellbeing.			Margaret Davies / Governing Body	July 2026		Ongoing					ALN review completed and busines case now ready to go to review and re-structure provisions	Business case to be shared with governors for deliberation
67 NEW		7.3 - Ysgol Friars - Support for Staff and Children	Ensure that specific resources are allocated for pupils' wellbeing and safety.			Cyngor Gwynedd											
68 NEW		67.1			plan pending			Margaret Davies									
		7.3 - Ysgol Friars - Support for Staff and Children	Support staff to build a culture of safety, trust and respect, providing additional training where necessary.			Cyngor Gwynedd											
		68.1			2 hour Group B external training in place.			Margaret Davies	September 2025			Yes				completed	ongoing training needed
		68.2			E-learning training for each staff member in place.			Margaret Davies	October 2025			Yes				all staff have completed	
		68.3			Supporting the Safeguarding Team to settle into the School - need to meet and understand the county structures / the support available and develop relationships.			Margaret Davies / Gwern ap Rhisiart	Autumn Term		Ongoing					meeting officers as and when required	
		68.4			Introducing weekly pastoral meetings to share information about vulnerable pupils.			Margaret Davies								pastoral meetings now happen every Wednesday morning with tutors	continue to gain feedback from staff on quality of information
		68.5			Organise training where necessary following a staff survey in terms of training needs.		AJ		Spring Term		Red						
69 NEW		7.3 - Ysgol Friars - Support for Staff and Children	Monitor Myconcern statistics every half term to ensure that training meets the needs of the School.			AJ			Autumn Term onwards							monitoring in place and first report taken to governors 24/11	Need to refine categories as too broad to break down in some areas
		69.1			Ensuring staff are aware of what's available. RASAC available at the time of publication of the report.			Gwern ap Rhisiart	At the time of publication of the report							RASAC has been in place and continues to support as needed	continue to respond to staff needs in relation to support
		69.2			Local Authority to look at support in dealing with guilt - this is a theme that arises with the staff especially after recent training			Gwern ap Rhisiart	At the time of publication of the report								

70	NEW	7.4 - Safeguarding	Ensure that the role of the temporary additional Safeguarding Officer is effectively integrated, with a clear framework in terms of accountability and oversight.		Cyngor Gwynedd										
	70.1		Group C training in place.			Margaret Davies	September 2025							All SLT and relevant staff completed	Opening up Group C to pastoral staff at this time
		70.2	Weekly meetings with headteacher and designated Person.			Margaret Davies	September 2025 onwards							Meetings in place and continue to monitor workload and wellbeing of DSP	Local authority officer visits every 3 weeks- this to continue
		70.3	The opportunity to meet and develop a relationship with agencies - induction program for staff New To Role.			Gwern ap Rhisiart	To be discussed								
		70.4	Meetings between Children's Services teams and the School to ensure processes are in place.			Gwern ap Rhisiart									
71	NEW	7.4 - Ysgol Friars - Safeguarding	Continue to monitor the impact and develop a plan for a long-term sustainable solution when the temporary funding ends.		Cyngor Gwynedd										
		71.1	Termly reports to governors in relation to child protection/ safeguarding and staff roles.			Margaret Davies	December		Ongoing					Inplace first report 24/11	Special Governors meeting 1/12 and school will act on feedback from governors on the report
		71.2	Finance and staffing committee to consider the future following receipt of next year's budget.			Governing Body	April 2026							Grant for 2nd year completed	
72	NEW	7.4 - Safeguarding	To carry out regular safeguarding audits and provide ongoing assurance to the Authority and the Programme Board.		Cyngor Gwynedd										
		72.1	Estyn's safeguarding self-evaluation to be presented to governors in October.			Margaret Davies / Governing Body	October 2025							due 24/11	annual revisit to support self evaluation
		72.2	Local Authority to visit the School regularly to carry out regular audits and report back to the board			Gwern ap Rhisiart	November 2025							School audit in place and feeds into action plan. LA safeguarding visit completed and awaiting report and recommendations	awaiting report and recommendations
		72.3	Designated governor and the designated person to carry out half-term audits and report back to the governing body.			Margaret Davies / Governing Body	Every half term							this will be developed	
73	NEW	7.5 - Ysgol Friars - Communication and Transparency	Strengthen communication methods with parents, pupils and the wider community to build trust and confidence in the new arrangements.		Cyngor Gwynedd										
		73.1	Updating the website.			Margaret Davies / Governing Body	September 2025		Ongoing					Website has been updated and continue to work on it as a result of feedback.	we need to consider if our provider is the right
		73.2	Introducing class charts.			Margaret Davies / Governing Body	September 2025- parents October 2025							classcharts introduced, training undertaken and staff confident in its use. Now also open to parents and carers	continue to develop its functions to support communication
		73.3	Introducing monthly drop-ins.			Margaret Davies / Governing Body	September 2025		Ongoing					Series of drop ins have been introduced however attendance is low	Need to work with families as to how best to engage in workshops
		73.4	Regular meetings with parents e.g. how to support your child in Year 11.			Margaret Davies / Governing Body	October 2025		Ongoing					Sessions have happened and continue to be planned to support pupils needs	Additional sessions for Year 11 commissioned by an external agency for Fen 2026 on wellbeing and support
		73.5	Regular correspondence with parents.			Margaret Davies / Governing Body	In progress		Ongoing					this is at the early stage of development	continue to develop its functions to support communication
		73.6	Regular contact with parents.			Margaret Davies / Governing Body	November 2025		Ongoing					Established and continues to be developed	Full survey to be sent in January
		73.7	Developing a social media presence.			Margaret Davies / Governing Body	October 2025		Ongoing					Continues to be an area for development	
		73.8	Rescheduling of morning services.			Margaret Davies / Governing Body	September 2025							Rotas in place and this term nearly all assemblies have happened as planned	need to continue to refine to share immediate messages
		73.9	Rescheduling and extending the morning registration period.			Margaret Davies / Governing Body	September 2025							completed	registration now extended for improved tutor relationships
		73.10	Work with local governors and local agencies to develop relationships with the community.			Margaret Davies / Governing Body	In progress		Ongoing					Early stages of development with links with agencies strengthening	
		73.11	Collect parental views more consistently and report back on improvements following this, e.g. annual parent survey plus opportunities for parents to raise queries and give feedback at annual year-group meetings.			Margaret Davies / Governing Body	December 2025		Ongoing					Next survey January 2026	
74	NEW	7.5 - Ysgol Friars - Communication and Transparency	Publish regular updates on the school's progress and actions, including responding to the recommendations of the CPR report.		Cyngor Gwynedd										
		74.1	Work with the Local Authority's communications department to ensure that communication is			Margaret Davies / Governing Body / Sian Gwynfryn Jones	In progress							letters prepared and sent	
		74.2	Work with the education department ensuring that joint lettering takes place on CPR issues			Margaret Davies / Governing Body / Sian Gwynfryn Jones / Sarah Marion Jones	September 2025							letters prepared and sent	

Our Bravery Brought Justice

Extended Child Practice Review
Gwynedd 2024

Brief outline of circumstances resulting in the Review

Legal Context

This extended Child Practice Review (CPR) was commissioned by North Wales Safeguarding Board on the recommendation of the Child Practice Review Sub-Group following receipt of a joint referral by LA1 and North Wales Police. This is in accordance with the Guidance for Multi Agency Child Practice Reviews¹. The criteria for this Review are met by the details of the case:

Circumstances leading to the Review

On the 6 September 2023 a pupil at Ysgol Friars, a school in North Wales, showed staff images and messages on her phone which she reported were from the Headteacher, Neil Foden. The phone number was checked and confirmed to be that of the Headteacher. The content of a number of the messages was explicitly sexual and images showed the pupil in Foden's car. The pupil is reported in the referral by the member of staff who took the disclosure to have said that she had been in a '*romantic relationship*' with Foden for a number of months prior to disclosure.

Foden was arrested later the same day and remanded in custody. Following this, other victims came forward making disclosures of a sexual nature. The criminal case went to court in April 2024 and Foden was sentenced on 1 July 2024. Foden was found guilty of 19 charges against four female pupils at the school where he was Headteacher, including 12 counts of sexual activity with a child and two counts of sexual activity with a child while in a position of trust. He was acquitted on charges relating to one other child. Foden was subsequently sentenced to 17 years imprisonment and is currently serving his sentence. The judge recognised in his summing up that Foden had been under-charged.

The CPR Chair interviewed Foden on two occasions in July 2025.

¹ <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-06/working-together-to-safeguard-people-volume-2-child-practice-reviews.pdf>

For the purpose of this report, the following anonymisation is used:

Victims/ Survivors
Child victims/ survivors of Foden's sexual abuse A, B, C, D, E, F, G, S
Child victims/ survivors of Foden's use of restrictive processes/ restraint H, I, J, M

Adults	Abbreviated to:
Headteacher Ysgol Friars/Perpetrator	Foden
Former Designated Safeguarding Person Ysgol Friars	DSP 1
Senior Management team- wider group of school leaders outside Core SMT	SMT
Core Senior Management Team, Ysgol Friars	Core SMT 1
Core Senior Management Team & Designated Safeguarding Person, Ysgol Friars	DSP 2 (also a member of Core SMT)
Core Senior Management Team, Ysgol Friars	Core SMT 3
Deputy Designated Safeguarding Person, Ysgol Friars	DDSP
Chair of Governors, Ysgol Friars	Chair of Governors
Deputy Chair of Governors, Ysgol Friars	Gov 2
Chair of Governors, School 2	Gov 3
Designated Safeguarding Person, School 2 (<i>Foden appointed Executive/ Strategic head in School 2 on temporary basis</i>)	Deputy Head DSP School 2
Social Work Practitioner	LA2 Children's Services Practitioner
Local Authority 1 Chief Executive	LA1 Chief Executive
Local Authority 1 Children and Family Services	LA1 C&FS
Local Authority 1 Education Department	LA1 Ed
Local Authority 1 (Former) Director of Children & Families Services	LA1 Director C&FS
Local Authority 1 Head of Children's Services	LA1 Head C&FS
Local Authority 1 Children's Services Senior Manager, Local Authority Designated Officer for Child Safeguarding	LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO
Team Leader Local Authority 1 Children's & Family Services	LA1 Team Leader C&FS
Local Authority 1 Head of Education	LA1 Head of Education 1
Local Authority 1 Head of Department, Education, Later Head of Education	LA1 Senior Manager Ed2, Later Head of Education 2

Designated Lead Officer for Safeguarding Children in Education	LA1 Ed3
Local Authority 1 Legal	LA1 Legal
Local Authority 1 Statutory Director of Social Services	LA1 Stat Dir SS
Local Authority 1 (Former) Corporate Director	LA1 Former Corp Dir
School Police Liaison Officer	NWP School PLO

Other	
Local Authority 1	LA1
Neighbouring Local Authorities	LA2, LA3
North Wales Police	NWP
Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board	BCUHB
Welsh Joint Education Committee	WJEC

All acronyms used in main body text are listed in appendix 1.

Time Period Under Review and Why

The inaugural meeting of the CPR Panel agreed the period under review would be January 2017 (based on first documented incident) until 6 September 2023, the day of the arrest. However, in line with the guidance, it was unanimously agreed by the Panel in May 2025 that the timeline would be extended to the 30 September 2023 in order to enable a review of actions taken on the day of disclosure and the days following, and to identify any lessons learned from the agency responses.

North Wales Police (NWP) were able to share intelligence about additional and non-recent matters of concern relating to Foden. This background provided Reviewers with useful insight into the wider context of his offending behaviour. These have been taken into consideration in formulating the hypotheses and recommendations.

Since Foden's conviction in July 2024 further victims have come forward. The earliest alleged sexual abuse was in 1979 when Foden had just qualified as a teacher and was in his first post. Given the significant changes in society's understanding of child sexual abuse, reviewing practices in operation at that time would not increase current learning. The victim from 1979 agrees with this position.

Timelines, chronologies and analyses were submitted by 14 agencies in the three local authorities - Local Authority 1, Local Authority 2 and Local Authority 3 who had contact with the school by virtue of some pupils attending Ysgol Friars being resident outside LA1's border.

Agency	Chronology	Analysis
Local Authority 1 Education	x	x

Ysgol Friars	Requested repeatedly-not supplied	
Local Authority 1 Children & Family Services	x	x
NSPCC	x	x
SARC	x	
North Wales Police	x	x
BCUHB Hospital records	x	
BCUHB GP Records	x	
LA3 Social Services	x	
LA3 Education	x	
LA2 Children and Family Services	x	
BCUHB CAMHS	x	
BCUHB Child Health Records	x	

Information was merged into one overarching chronology that has been presented to the Reviewers. Ysgol Friars was not able to submit a chronology of events to the CPR despite having been asked. The lack of stable leadership in the school in terms of Headship and Governance, the frequent changes of roles and responsibilities in LA1 Education Department, coupled with the paucity of contemporaneous records kept in both organisations prevented the Review from constructing a chronology retrospectively. Neither of Foden's Deputy Headteachers (SMT 1 and DSP 2) made themselves available to speak to the Review beyond initial introductions during the first visits to the School in July and October 2024, although the CPR team did make LA1 SMT 1 aware in July 2024 that they were making a Safeguarding Referral about a member of staff to LA1 C&FS about a member.

This is a complex case spanning just under 7 years and involving a prolific sex offender who harmed many children. This Review is unique in its size and scale, analysing ten times the volume of information that is usually reviewed in a CPR. That notwithstanding the Reviewers were mindful that the victims/survivors and those supporting them had already endured a significant period of time between Foden's arrest and conviction, and the appointment of the CPR team and Panel. It was therefore resolved that the Review should aim to be completed in as close to a year as possible.

Foden was a powerful figure within the Education community in Wales, including high profile union involvement, association with the WJEC and presenting to Welsh Government and the Senedd. Many of those who had not met him may have known of his wide-ranging reputation as a bully.

Foden courted the media- as demonstrated by his national press coverage over the dinner money scandal in late 2021- and was also the subject of posts on social media including videos, some of which were posted by pupils.

The Reviewers and Panel

The case had high profile media reporting, involved a number of local authorities and public sector agencies and it was therefore imperative that the Reviewers were independent. In order to guarantee independence, a Child Practice Review Chair and the Reviewers who were selected had not previously worked for any of the agencies involved within North Wales. The Child Practice Review Chair is a Registered Social Worker with a background in Criminal Justice and Child Sexual Abuse. One Reviewer is a fluent Welsh speaker with a recent background in Education and had previously worked on improving the effectiveness of multi-agency public service delivery. The other Reviewer has experience in both Education and Children's Social Care held role of LADO in London and worked in a multi-agency environment across 33 London Boroughs. All Panel meetings were conducted with a provision for simultaneous translation.

It was important that none of the CPR team had professional or familial connections in North Wales. All identified panel members confirmed there were no conflicts of interests with the case material identified (this was reviewed continuously throughout the process). One member of the initial Review team stood down in October 2024 when it emerged that an extended family member had historically held a role in LA1 at a time outside the terms of reference.

On commencement of the Review process, in July 2024, Ysgol Friars was about to break for the summer holiday. There had also been a restructuring process which had led to redundancies. This meant the Reviewers needed to make themselves available in school immediately to hear direct from staff. The Reviewers therefore visited the school in July 2024. This was the first of a total of nine days spent on site, meeting with over 80 staff and interviewing a further 60. The Reviewers were approached by retired staff, those who were on maternity leave and others who were absent from school. All requests to meet with the Reviewers were accommodated. Parents were informed and provided with the Review email address and the opportunity to contact and meet the CPR Chair and Reviewers. The Review Panel recognised that there were barriers to engaging in this process for some, including issues of confidence, or needing additional assistance to access the Review process. Arrangements were made to enable their involvement, and for their voice to be heard, as outlined in the 9 protected characteristics of the *Equalities Act (2010)*².

Over the twelve months of the Review, the Reviewers have met and spoken with 140 individuals representing all relevant groups and agencies, some of whom had needed time to come forward. The Chair, Reviewers and Panel recognise and value their courage in doing so.

At the heart of the Review are the victims/survivors directly harmed by Foden. The CPR Chair contacted them via those tasked with supporting them and offered to meet with them at a time and place of their choosing accompanied by their families or advocates. Some of the victims/survivors felt able to participate in the Review and the CPR Chair reported back to them on the CPR process and draft

² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

recommendations to ensure their voice was heard and they could contribute to the recommendations.

The Reviewers and CPR Panel wish to acknowledge their bravery and strength in choosing to contribute to this Review in their desire to better protect others in the future, despite having already been involved in the prolonged journey of the case through the Criminal Justice System. The Reviewers are indebted to them.

The CPR process allows for Reviewers to review all the information available in order to develop hypotheses about what enabled harm to be caused. The hypotheses were reviewed and then approved by the Panel and further refined at Learning Events which were open to frontline staff who had involvement in the case. Because of the scale of this Review, five multi-agency Learning Events were held in the first half of 2025- four for practitioners and one for managers. Contributions made at these events have been incorporated into this Report. The hypotheses form the backbone of this report and basis for the recommendations, the aim of which is to reduce the likelihood of abuse happening again.

The CPR Chair has continued to meet with victims and their families (where appropriate) throughout the Review. The CPR Team delivered a briefing to the current Governing Body at the school to ensure learning could be acted on at the earliest opportunity rather than wait for publication of the Review. Similarly, any immediate opportunities to improve service delivery were identified with, and referred to, relevant agencies so that improvements were not hindered pending the finalisation of the CPR process.

Background

Foden joined Ysgol Friars (School) as a teacher of English in 1988 and was promoted to Deputy Head before becoming Headteacher in 1997. Foden had been described to the Panel as being '*larger than life*' - both in stature and presence- renowned for the way in which he ran the school. Well known in the local community, Local Authority and often referenced by local and national press, the BBC referred to Foden as being the '*go to person*' if an opinion was needed on a controversial matter or where other Headteachers in Wales were reluctant to engage.

A prominent figure in the education union now known as the National Education Union (NEU), in 2018 Foden was found guilty by the Education Workforce Council (EWC) of having bullied a member of his own staff who was subsequently awarded compensation. Foden was widely acknowledged by those interviewed as being a bully. This behaviour was linked to a matter which had resulted in a complaint being made about him to the exam board (WJEC) regarding the manipulation of examination results. This complaint was also upheld.

In 2018, following the sudden death of the Deputy Head and Designated Safeguarding Person (DSP 1), Foden appointed himself as Pastoral Lead at the school and took on the role of oversight of safeguarding matters, supported by the School Office Manager. At this point Foden also implemented a change in the

structure of the pastoral team, replacing professional teaching staff with non-teaching staff taking up the Heads of Year role. At the end of 2018, a new Deputy Head and Designated Safeguarding Person was appointed to the role of DSP (DSP 2) in Ysgol Friars, despite lacking any notable safeguarding experience. DSP 2 was supported by the School Office Manager who was untrained and also inexperienced in safeguarding.

In 2018 the first concern about Foden's interactions with a female pupil was raised. This was soon followed by a series of other complaints and concerns being raised with both LA1 Education (LA1 Ed) and Children and Families Services (LA1 C&FS) departments.

During the period under review, numerous concerns were raised about Foden. These are summarized in the table below. The red bullet points indicate when Foden was reportedly spoken to about his behaviour.

Prior to his arrest in September 2023 Foden did not have any criminal convictions recorded against him. Following his sentencing in July 2024 a further victim has come forward to the Reviewers alleging a non-recent sexual assault by Foden when she was a child and is therefore being treated as a victim by the team.

Timeline

Due to the complexity and size of the CPR a summary timeline has been added below as an overview/introduction to the case.

The red bullet points in the right-hand column refer to recorded references of Foden having been spoken to by officials or colleagues about the need to modify his behaviour. There are no written records of the content of these discussions, nor of Foden's response.

Foden's victims of sexual abuse were all female.

Foden's victims of excessive force used in restraint were all male.

Date	Incident	
1979		
	Alleged sexual assault of a child – victim disclosed in 2023	
1997		
	Foden appointed Headteacher Ysgol Friars	
2017		
	Foden taken to tribunal for bullying staff	
	Complaint to exam board re manipulation of exam results	
2018		

	Foden messaging Child C online late at night	
	Child C seen in Foden's office, asleep with head on desk	
July	Child A reports concern re Foden's relationship with Child C. Education speak to Foden. Reported to LA1 C&FS and NWP	
July	Hostel Manager reports concern re relationship between Foden and Child C to LA1 C&FS	
August	Foden assumes pastoral lead role after death of DSP 1	
2019		
January	Foden restructures the school pastoral team	
January/February	Child A - Foden attends Child Protection meeting in LA2 & accompanies her to Police interview	
March	Foden accompanies Child A to GP appointment without parents' knowledge	•
	Noted by agencies that Child A had Foden's email address	
	Foden accompanied Child A to the SARC	
	Core SMT 1 spoke to Foden about his being alone with vulnerable female pupils, as he could be vulnerable to false allegations	•
April	Foden accompanies Child A to hospital Gynaecological appointment	
	Core SMT 1 speaks to Head of Ed1 re his concerns about Foden having 1:1 contact with Child A and Child C	
	Meeting of senior LA1 officials to discuss – outcome Head of Ed1 to speak to Foden about boundaries	•
May	Foden accompanies Child A to second gynaecological appointment & medical outcome letter sent c/o Foden at school address	•
June	Foden tells Part 4 meeting in LA2 re Child A that she had previously made an allegation against him. This was not challenged	
July	LA2 Children's Services practitioner reports concern about the relationship between Foden and Child A	

	Child A's mother reports to LA2 Children's Services practitioner her concerns about relationship between Foden and Child A	•
	Both concerns referred to LA1 C&FS	
	Child A's mother reiterates her concerns	•
	Senior officers in LA2 Children's Services request matter discussed with police – LA1 C&FS refused	•
2020		
February	NSPCC make referral to LA1 C&FS re Foden's relationship with Child A	
	SARC make similar referral to LA1 C&FS re Foden's relationship with Child A	
March	LA1 C&FS determine threshold not met for Part 4 investigation	
	COVID School closure	
April	Foden known to have Child A and Child C in the school during Covid lockdown	
	Core SMT 1 & 3 at the school exchange messages that Foden was putting himself at risk of malicious allegations	
May	Child S complained to school staff that Foden was too physically close to her	
October	EWC find Foden guilty of professional misconduct and issue 2-year reprimand	
2021		
May	Allegation of inappropriate restrictive practice by Foden against Child I	
June	Foden appointed Executive/ Strategic Head of School 2	
September	Allegation of inappropriate restrictive practice Child I Section 5 meeting held	
October	Referral from School 2 re Foden's interactions with Child G	
	Separate referral from Mental Health Care agency re Foden's interactions with Child G	
	S.47 Investigation held by LA1 C&FS re Child G	
November	Foden hits national headlines re school dinners issue	
	Child Protection meeting re restrictive practice Child I	

	Section 5 Professional Strategy Discussion re behaviour with Child G	•
	Suspension of Foden recommended by LA1 Director Social Services leads to instruction to Foden by Chair of Governors to work from home- no suspension	•
	Incident of unreasonable force Child J	•
2022		
January	Foden returns to work in both schools	
	Further concerns raised about Child G	
	Section 5 meeting re Child I	•
February	Use of unreasonable force referred re Child H. Section 5 and s.47 discussions held	
October	Concerns raised about Foden being alone in his room with Child F	•
November	Foden alleged to have sexually assaulted adult female on school premises	
2023		
March	Core SMT 1 & 3 and DSP 2 discuss concerns about Foden's meeting with female pupils alone in his room	
	DSP 2 writes to Foden detailing Core SMT's concerns & includes requests that future meetings with children be held with door open, lights on and blinds up	•
June	Member of staff raises concerns with Core SMT 1 & 3 and DSP 2 about Foden's interactions with Child F	
July	Carer of Child F raises concerns about Foden's relationship with Child F	
	At meeting with Social worker Child F discloses Foden had hugged her without her permission	
	Social worker refers concerns re Child F to LA1 C&FS	
September	Child D discloses sexual abuse by Foden	
	Foden arrested	
	Section 5 Professional Strategy Meeting	
	Senior Officers Meeting	
	Governing Body Extraordinary Meeting	

Key events and agency involvement

In April 2017 a safeguarding meeting was held in regard to Child A who had recently joined the school. At this meeting a safety plan was discussed, and it was agreed that Child A should engage with the female Office Manager (later appointed DDSP) for support. A note was made on the School Information Management System (SIMS) and posted prominently in the Staff Room that she should not be alone with male members of staff.

In early 2018 evidence on the school system showed that Foden was frequently messaging Child C, using her personal email address. Messages were often sent out of school hours and late at night. This was not identified as a cause of concern at the time.

Child C was known to the then Office Manager (later appointed DDSP) to be spending time in Foden's office, for example sleeping with her head on his desk.

On 9 July 2018 Child A reported to the NWP School Liaison Officer her concerns about another pupil (identity unknown to Child A at the time) who she had observed walking alone with Foden over recent weeks on the school site and getting into his car. This child was identified by the school as being Child C. NWP referred the concern to DSP 1, who was immediately able to identify the pupil as Child C. DSP1 described Child C as vulnerable and explained that she needed a lift home as he believed she would not have been safe on public transport. This explanation was accepted by NWP and LA1 C&FS. Neither Child A nor Child C were spoken to about this, and no further action was taken. There is no evidence that the Chair of Governors was informed of the concerns about Foden.

9 July 2018 was identified by the Review as the first time that the Local Authority should have been put on notice about concerns relating to Foden and his interaction with children.

This was a missed opportunity

Less than two weeks later, on 24 July 2018 the Manager of the hostel where Child C was resident notified NWP that they had referred concerns to both Children's and Adult Services in LA2 where Child C was resident. At this time Child C was 18 and preparing to sit her A level exams.

The hostel Manager reported that Child C was frequently alone with Foden in his room at school; she was also given a lift in his car. The Manager requested an objective assessment of the risks to each party.

The information was shared with LA1 C&FS and LA1 Ed. The resulting decision made to take no further action was based on the belief that as a criminal threshold had not been met, no further action was needed. The agencies did not consider the

suitability (See appendix 1) of Foden's behaviour in having such close contact and interactions with Child C in terms of his professional position.

There is no evidence that a connection was made between the concern raised on 24 July 2018 and the referral made less than two weeks previously that each related to the same child. Child C was not spoken with on this occasion and the Chair of Governors was not informed, even though this was the second referral within 2 weeks regarding Foden and Child C. No further action was taken on either case.

This was a missed opportunity

On 15 August 2018 DSP 1 died and Foden assumed the role of safeguarding and pastoral lead although he had no qualifications, expertise or experience in this field. The Reviewers have seen no evidence of management oversight by the Chair of Governors or LA1 Head of Education 1 over his *de-facto* adoption of this role.

Between August 2018 and January 2019, the Office Manager whose experience in safeguarding at the time was limited to supporting the late DSP 1, took on the role of DDSP and was managed by Foden. The newly appointed DDSP was reassured by Foden that despite their lack of training that they could turn to him for support and guidance '*as an expert*'.

In January 2019 the new Deputy Head Pastoral (DSP 2) took up his post. He came from a pastoral Key Stage 3 role in an independent girls' school in England, with limited experience of safeguarding arrangements in Wales and limited safeguarding training. This was recognised by Foden who agreed to continue with his oversight of the safeguarding function until DSP 2 was able to access an appropriate level of safeguarding training. The Review could not evidence that DSP 2 had received previous safeguarding training, other than the basic training routinely provided to all teachers. This lack of safeguarding expertise was particularly significant because of the size of Friars, a school of 1400 children, and the requirements of the role.

In January 2019 Child A made a disclosure to both Foden and a member of pastoral staff detailing safeguarding concerns which related to a professional employed in a statutory agency. As a result of this LA2 held a series of meetings under Part 4 of the AWCPP 2008 (see appendix 1). Minutes of the meetings show Foden in attendance.

On 31 January 2019 it was agreed that in relation to that allegation, Child A would attend an ABE interview (see appendix 1). Child A would need a responsible adult to accompany her to the interview as family circumstances meant that she did not wish to be accompanied by her mother. Foden volunteered to accompany her to this interview, an unusual undertaking for a Headteacher, particularly in a school of this size.

On 2 February 2019 it was noted at the second Part 4 Meeting that Child A had Foden's work email address and that Foden had taken her to a GP appointment. This was also unusual but was not remarked upon. Child A was 15 at this time.

This was a missed opportunity

On 11 March 2019 Foden accompanied Child A to an appointment at the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) (appendix 1).

The Review was told that at around this time, Core SMT 1 had spoken to Foden advising him not to have 1:1 interaction with female pupils alone in his room, reminding him of professional boundaries and that he was making himself vulnerable to allegations.

On 4 April 2019 Foden accompanied Child A to a hospital gynaecological appointment without her parent's knowledge.

On 12 April 2019 Core SMT 1 contacted LA1 Head of Education 1 asking for an urgent '*in person*' meeting. At this meeting Core SMT 1 expressed his concern that Foden was spending time alone in his office with two vulnerable female pupils and could be making himself vulnerable and open to allegations. In the meeting the pupils were identified as Child A and Child C. Neither party made any written note of the meeting.

LA1 Head C&FS requested a meeting on a '*Mater Diogelu Brys- Cyfrinachol*' (*Urgent Safeguarding matter - Confidential*) via email to LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO.

On 15 April 2019 a meeting of four senior LA1 officers from LA1 Ed, LA1 C&FS and LA1 Legal departments was held to consider the information reported by Core SMT 1 to LA1 Head of Education 1. No formal minutes were made of this meeting however the Reviewers have seen transcripts of handwritten notes taken contemporaneously by two attendees. Core SMT 1 was not invited to the meeting to give further information. The meeting was deemed not to be a child protection meeting and was instead regarded as being for the consideration of a '*professional issue*'.

In the meeting the two vulnerable pupils were named as Child A and Child C, and several risk factors were identified including:

- The pupils being alone with Foden in his room for long periods
- A female pupil seen with her head on Foden's shoulder
- Foden holding one child by both hands
- Foden driving them, on their own, home in [his] car.
- The pupils having Foden's personal phone number
- That Core SMT 1 had spoken to Foden (over Easter) to tell him to '*back off*'
- That other staff were also concerned about these meetings

No note was made that one of the female pupils named, Child C, was the subject of two referrals relating to Foden in 2018 (one of which was made by the second pupil, Child A who was also named in the meeting). Neither pupil had been spoken with in 2018. The second pupil was also identified as being vulnerable. This would have been known to LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO, but no connection was made

between the two events. The meeting in 2018 had been attended by LA1 Senior Manager Ed2, Later Head of Education 2. There is no evidence to demonstrate that LA1 Head of Education 1 had been made aware of the content of the meeting held in 2018 or that the content was reviewed in the meeting in 2019.

Moreover, at this time Child A was subject to Child Protection Procedures in LA2. Had any new enquiries been made with LA2, the information that Foden was accompanying her to medical appointments would have come to light. Neither of the pupils were spoken to regarding these concerns and a decision was ultimately made not to proceed to Part 4 of the AWCPP 2008 on the basis that this was a '*professional*' rather than a safeguarding matter.

This was a missed opportunity

It appears to have been agreed that LA1 Head of Education 1 would speak to Foden to remind him about boundaries. There is no record of this conversation nor of Foden's response. However, on the balance of probabilities, it is likely that this conversation did take place, as when Foden became aware that it was Core SMT 1 who had raised the concern it was reported that Foden gave him the '*cold shoulder*' for a number of months.

On 1 May 2019 Foden accompanied Child A to a further hospital appointment. The clinician wrote to Health 3 on 16 May 2019 noting Foden in attendance '*again*' and also consulted with Health Safeguarding team.

A letter subsequently sent by the consultant in mid-May 2019 includes the consultant's understanding that Child A '*spends a lot of time with Foden in his room*' and noted that Child A was receiving counselling from Foden. The letter was sent to Child A via the school and was addressed to Foden, again without the parent's agreement or knowledge. The letter was found by Reviewers in an unlocked cabinet in what had been Foden's office in August 2024 – more than five years later.

Core SMT1 believes that in May 2019 he raised concerns about Foden's resumed behaviour as Child A was noted to be in Foden's office again, but no written record was kept of any meeting. In any event, the matter was left to '*resolve itself*' as it was understood that Child A was leaving the school at the end of the academic year; the assumption being that if Child A was not in school there would be no risk to Foden of false allegations. There is no evidence that the risk to Child A was considered.

This was a missed opportunity

On 6 June 2019 during the concluding Part 4 meeting held in LA2 regarding Child A's disclosure of abuse by a professional who had been employed in another statutory agency, Foden stated- unsolicited- that Child A had recently made an allegation against himself which he stated '*had no grounds*'. Foden explained that Child A '*had misinterpreted something*'. This statement was not challenged by the LADO from

LA2 who was chairing the meeting, and no subsequent inquiries were made or any attempt to cross-reference the statement with what was known about Foden by LA1 C&FS.

This was a missed opportunity

On 4 July 2019 an email from an LA2 Children's Service Practitioner to their senior manager detailed concerns raised by Child A's mother that Foden's behaviours were similar to those of the perpetrator (from another agency), referenced in the Part 4 meetings above. Mother noted that Child A spent most of her time, both in and out of school, with Foden who seemed overly kind and over familiar. Mum stated that there had been two occasions when Foden had not returned [Child A] home until after 9.30pm, as they had apparently been at a cake-making evening or open evening. Mum also stated that both [Child A] and Foden were '*almost too over familiar with each other, in regards to how they greet each other or making a joke out of their situation*'. Mum was not sure what to do or how to approach the matter.

The LA2 Children's Service Practitioner agreed to speak about it with their manager. A second LA2 Children's Service Practitioner had also met with Child A in Foden's presence, and they too had noted that the relationship was '*too informal*' and that Foden had taken Child A to medical appointments without either parent's knowledge. Both issues were discussed with the senior manager in LA2.

On 5 July 2019 information from the LA2 Children's Service Practitioner was shared by a Senior Manager in LA2 with LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO who confirmed that LA1 Head of Education 1 had previously spoken to Foden about boundaries in a similar context. The NWP referral relating to the July 2018 concern was then shared with LA2, noting that Child A was, in that case, the referrer and not the subject of the concern; Child A had raised the concern with the NWP School PLO who referred it to LA1 C&FS and NWP.

Following the referral from LA2 there was considerable email traffic relating to the case, the conclusion from LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO being that

'On its own, it does not appear to meet the threshold for Part 4, but the behaviour is one of boundary/over-reliance and leaves Foden open to criticism. I will be sending a message to LA1 Head of Education 1 to enquire where the issue is now'.

This letter refers to the concerns raised in April 2019 and the request for the LA1 Head of Education 1 to discuss the matter with Foden.

On 8 July 2019 NWP and LA1 C&FS held a Section 3 Strategy Discussion, the record states that NWP

'agreed that the information noted raised concerns re the reported behaviour of Foden in that he appears to be overly familiar with this pupil and his

involvement appears to go beyond what would be expected in his professional role'.

It was recorded that:

'There have been similar concerns noted previously in relation to another female pupil, whereby Foden was spending a great deal of time alone with this pupil, who was vulnerable, and that Foden maintained he was offering additional support in a pastoral role' and that 'there is no evidence of direct abuse towards the young person, no complaint has been made'.

The decision was made that there was insufficient [information] to warrant a formal strategy discussion or consideration under part 4 AWCPP 2008 (see appendix 1) since there was no specific allegation of abuse, and that the matter should be referred back to LA1 Ed for further steps to be taken with regard to professional boundaries and the suitability of such behaviour. The Review contends that there was no reference to the suitability criteria outlined in the AWCPP 2008 (see page 65 and 158).

There is no evidence that anyone spoke to Child A or her mother to clarify concerns specifically raised in this referral.

This was a missed opportunity

On 11 July 2019 LA2 requested a further discussion with LA1 Head of Education 1 who referred to having previously had a '*shot across the bows*' discussion with Foden. LA2 informed LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO that had Foden been a professional working in LA2, a meeting would have been convened under Part 4 of the AWCPP 2008.

On 18 July 2019 Child A's mother again expressed her concerns to the LA2 Children's Service Practitioner, and a further report was made and discussed between LA1 C&FS, Head of Education LA2, LA1 Head of Education 1, Head of Service for Children and Families, LA2. The decision of the meeting was that the LA2 Children's Service Practitioner would not meet Child A in school again which would mean Foden would not be present at future meetings. It was assumed at this time that Child A would not be returning to Ysgol Friars for 6th form and that the concern would resolve itself if she was not in school. There were also insurance concerns around LA2 Children's Service Practitioner attending meetings in school during the summer holiday, and arrangements were made to meet elsewhere. Although concerns had already been raised about the amount of time Foden spent with Child A outside of school, the possibility of him meeting her during the school holidays was not considered.

This was a missed opportunity

On 19 July 2019 the Service Manager in LA2 requested that the matter be discussed with NWP with a view to convening a Part 4 meeting. LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO initially refused this request but then was persuaded, reluctantly, 2 days later.

LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO to Service Manager in LA2:

I therefore consider that you are stating in your opinion that there is threshold here, and that you think we should have a Strategy Discussion with the Police. I will ask Tim Cyfeiriadau Plant (Children's Referrals Team) to do this next week. In my opinion, there have already been two discussions on issues that required consideration in a Strategy Discussion, but there is no new information here that is indicative of an allegation or new information of significance. Whilst happy to ask them to check this and the Police in terms of threshold, I note that the threshold on the previous issues has already been considered to avoid re-weighing already proven information. Obviously if there are further actions I will let you know.

You asked – do you need to refer it to [LA1 C&FS]? No. I will do it for you.

The reason I'm dealing with the issue in this way is that I'm not willing to be in a situation where another Council (LA2) suggests we talk to the Police, and we refuse that request. In a later situation of a review, our position would be impossible to defend especially as there is some disagreement between you and the Education Department as to what you think they should do about the issue here. I don't want to become a part of that.

Further meetings between LA2 Children's Service Practitioner and Child A were not held in the school. In a meeting in August 2019 Child A commented that she [Child A] 'gets away with loads of things no one else would' on account of her closeness to Foden.

The NSPCC had also been working in a supportive role with Child A since April 2019. In November 2019 supervision notes record that there had been some concern over Foden's professional boundaries in his interactions with Child A. These included answering Child A's emails out of school hours, Child A having Foden's work mobile number and on one occasion Child A having called an NSPCC practitioner from it.

On 6 February 2020 three months after having noted these previous concerns in supervision sessions, NSPCC made a child protection referral in relation to

'the concerns above and other concerns about the behaviour of Foden which indicated inappropriate professional boundaries.'

The referral was sent to both LA1 C&FS as the employing authority and LA2 as the child's home authority. However, the response from LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO was that

'this appeared to be a matter of professional boundaries rather than an allegation of abuse as such it did not fit into the definition of the AWCPP 2008 but with the anticipated launch of the 2020 procedures (see appendix 1), it may fit when that became operational'.

This was a missed opportunity

In September 2019 the Head of 6th Form at Ysgol Friars informed DSP 2 that they had been directed by Foden to admit Child A back into the school to study at A level, in contrast to what had been understood in July- that she wouldn't be returning to sixth form. DSP 2 was concerned about this and stated in a report seen by this Review that he subsequently spoke to LA1 Head of Education 1 expressing his concern. No written record was kept of this contact, and LA1 Head of Education 1 has no recollection of this.

On 28 February 2020 similar concerns regarding the relationship between Foden and Child A were referred to LA1 C&FS by the SARC (see appendix 1), noting an '*over familiarity*' between them, referring to his age and there being '*a lot of banter*'.

On 9 March 2020 the response from the LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO was that '*AWCPP, 2008 is still operational, this is the basis not to hold a Part-4*'. It was noted by LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO that NSPCC had retracted their referral, which the NSPCC deny. On the same day LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO wrote to LA1 Head of Education 1 stating

'I want to note that I have previously raised the same matters about the same behaviour with regards to the same pupil'.

LA1 Head of Education 1 responded that he would seek HR advice and that the matter may need to be formalised. The Review is not aware of any records having been kept regarding any further advice being sought or provided. This is evidence that it was recognised that a **pattern** of inappropriate behaviour was continuing despite Foden having been spoken to.

This was a missed opportunity for review and intervention

Covid lockdown followed soon afterwards bringing with it, almost overnight, the biggest change in decades in the model of how education was delivered.

For most children and families Covid lockdown meant being educated at home with online support. However, children of key workers and vulnerable children were permitted to attend school in person. Foden was able to exploit this situation. Foden overrode the Government Covid Guidelines and chose which of the Covid Regulations he would uphold, and which he would not. For example, the child of one key worker was refused attendance at school despite the parent's concerted attempts to persuade the school that they were bound by a duty to accommodate this child under Government Covid guidelines.

In addition, in April and May 2020 during Covid, Core SMT 1 and 3 exchanged WhatsApp messages about Foden being alone in his office with vulnerable female

pupils, referring to Child A and C by their initials. Core SMT 1 and 3 commented on the risks Foden was taking in having the female pupils in his office and the risk of breaking the strict rules about who should be in school, social distancing and regarding travel arrangements, all of which Foden was openly flouting. Core SMT 1 refers back to already having spoken to LA1 Head of Education 1 about this and being reluctant to take it further again. It was considered that Foden was '*being silly*' by having vulnerable pupils in his room. In the messages, Core SMT 1 and 3 speculated that Foden must have made contact directly for the pupil to know that he was in school and that maybe Foden was in school specifically to meet that pupil. Core SMT 1 and 3 agree that they hope they are not right [in their speculations]. No referral to LA1 C&FS was made and indicates the deterrent effect of the previous negative experience of reporting their concerns. This earlier experience had resulted in the matter being discussed at a meeting of Senior LA1 Officers, but had not resulted in a formal Child Protection referral being made by any of those in attendance, nor a formal request to LA1 SMT 1 themselves to make a referral, notwithstanding Core SMT's statutory duty to refer safeguarding concerns. This is evidenced in the WhatsApp exchange among the Ysgol Friars Core SMT.

This was a missed opportunity

In May 2020 Child S complained that Foden was too physically close to her and had touched her face and hugged her. She spoke with two teachers about this, and they offered to speak to Foden. There is no record of whether the teachers followed this up.

On 7 October 2020 following the EWC Fitness to Practice investigation, Foden was found guilty of Professional Misconduct and was subject to a two-year reprimand. LA1 were informed, and it was later recommended that Foden be given professional advice. There is no evidence of this having happened.

On 18 May 2021, there was an incident where Foden was alleged to have used restrictive practice against a KS3 boy who was subsequently excluded. An informal complaint made by the parent framed a general sense that the child, despite having received good academic reports, had been repeatedly sanctioned for minor misdemeanours by male members of the SMT, amounting to victimisation. The issue that triggered the complaint related to an act of physical restraint by Foden, Core SMT 1 and DSP 2 over the male pupil's swearing and making unauthorised use of his phone. Staff had taunted the pupil to elicit a response which they could then capture on their personal mobile phone cameras. Foden was the main subject of the complaint. He had held the male pupil in a chokehold and later held him across his chest. Children's witness statements say Child M was saying he could not breathe (source Desktop Review, witness statements not seen by Reviewers). The initial complaint was ignored. When the parent followed this up, they were told to formalise their complaint, which they did. Eight weeks then passed without a response from the school. The school did not respond to requests by the parents to view CCTV nor see the Use of Reasonable Force 'HS11' form (see appendix 1). The parent did not feel that the nature of her complaint had been understood and was of the opinion that the restraint was not proportionate to the offence. Attempts by the parent to

escalate the complaint did not comply with the School Complaints Policy and resulted in them being dismissed as a vexatious complainant, a decision allegedly made in agreement with the Chair of Governors and Gov 2. The Review has not seen evidence of this. The matter was never referred to LA1 C&FS.

In June 2021 Foden was appointed to the Executive/ Strategic Headship of School 2. The Reviewers have seen evidence that LA1 Head of Education 1 consulted with four senior LA1 Officers, Chief Executive (who had been appointed to his role 2 weeks prior and had no knowledge of the history of allegations and concerns that had been made against him, nor of the guilty EWC finding), Head of Legal, Senior Manager Education Resources and the Secondary Education Officer, seeking their views on this appointment. It was reported to the Reviewers that the Secondary Lead at GwE (the former Regional School Improvement Service) had initially recommended Foden for the role. The Reviewers have seen an email which confirms that all four replied before LA1 Head of Education 1 responded to Foden concerning the appointment. The Reviewers have not been provided with evidence of, or access to, the 4 replies other than the confirmation email and note an apparent lack of due diligence and clear audit trail in this appointment process.

Foden presented his own terms for this role and submitted them to LA1. This arrangement meant that he was not accountable to the Governing Body of School 2, but to LA1 Head of Education 1, where normally a Headteacher is managed by the Chair of Governors. The Reviewers have seen no evidence of communication between the two Chairs of Governors, or between the Chairs and LA1 Head of Education 1 regarding the practicalities of Foden functioning across the two schools.

On 27 September 2021 Foden used restrictive practices on Child 1, a young KS3 boy in Ysgol Friars. Child 1, had a neurodevelopmental condition which caused him difficulty in social interaction and communication. Foden was aware of this. The parent did not make a complaint initially as they feared the permanent exclusion of Child 1, but they did request sight of CCTV footage of the incident. Child 1 was put on a short suspension.

An initial decision was made by the school that the incident (which had been filmed by Core SMT 1, the DDSP, DSP 2 and another senior staff member on their mobile phones) was not a safeguarding matter and therefore was not reported to LA1 Ed as is required in incidents of restraint. However, over a month later when LA 1 Head of Education 1 and Secondary Schools' Education Officer (who had each been on leave) were shown the CCTV footage by the Schools Data Protection Officer, they instructed that an immediate referral should be made. At no point did any of the staff who witnessed the event, or senior officers to whom the matter was referred, take any action against Foden.

The referral raised concerns about the nature of the restraint which included pushing to chair, tipping to floor, and pressure to the chest. These were not recognised techniques yet none of the four senior staff who stood by and witnessed the incident intervened, some even choosing to film the incident on their phones. All Wales Safeguarding Procedures were followed, under Part 3, s.47 and Section 5 Professional Strategy Meeting.

On 13 October 2021 Child G, a pupil at School 2, disclosed that on 12 October 2021 Foden had asked to see her in his office. When she refused Foden collected her from her first lesson and took her to his office himself.

On 15 October 2021 two referrals were sent to LA1 C&FS in relation to Foden's interactions with Child G.

School 2 made a referral to LA1 C&FS following Child G's disclosure that because of Foden she felt scared and uncomfortable coming to school, that her friends had shown her articles on social media about Foden and encouraged her to see that what Foden was doing to her was incorrect. They added that a Teaching Assistant had also shared that they had overheard another pupil say that Child G would be complaining about Foden because he had touched her leg. Child G had shown Deputy Head DSP School 2 email messages from Foden sent late at night.

On the same day a professional from a Health Care agency made a separate but similar referral to LA1 C&FS. Child G had disclosed to this Health Care practitioner that she was fearful of being excluded. She also informed the practitioner that she had spoken to Deputy Head DSP School 2, who had downloaded some of the emails from her phone and had also made a referral.

On 15 October 2021 LA1 Head of Education 1 wrote to the Chair of Governors (School 1) advising him on possible action to take regarding Foden. It is not clear what prompted that letter.

On 19 October 2021 responsibility was delegated to LA1 Team Leader C&FS to chair a strategy meeting at which it was agreed that a s.47 investigation would be carried out in regard to Child G and that confirmation of the emails sent by Foden would be sought. It was noted that there was no evidence of an offence having been committed but that there were boundary issues and that in terms of holding Section 5 Professional Strategy Meeting it was unclear whether there was abuse of a child. During the s.47 investigation Child G shared that Foden frightened her and that she had asked the Deputy Head DSP School 2 to inform Foden that she did not want to see him.

Child G said that Foden had given her a hug and described that he had both his arms around her and that her own arms hung down beside her. Child G said that Foden gives her the creeps. Child G said the hug lasted around 5-10 minutes.

The outcome of the s.47 investigation was that the concerns were substantiated but that Child G was not judged to be at risk of significant harm. No reason was given for this determination. School 2 had not been involved in nor made aware of Child Protection processes following their referral. Child G was advised by their social worker that the emails were inappropriate and unprofessional and to speak to her family about them.

This was a missed opportunity

3 November 2021 LA1 C&FS held a Section 5 Professional Strategy Discussion in regard to Foden's behaviour with Child G, attended by representatives from Education, Social Services and NWP.

Neither the Chair of Governors of School 2, nor the Chair of Governors at Ysgol Friars were invited to nor engaged with in relation to this meeting. Had Governing Body Chairs been involved in discussions regarding these concerns, a fuller consideration may have been given to an assessment of whether there was a transferable risk to pupils at Ysgol Friars.

This was a missed opportunity

Part of the meeting related to Foden having sent emails to Child G late at night and to her private email address. It was noted in the meeting that professionals had only seen emails from Child G's phone but that '*if the two are corresponding outside of school hours, not sure how far we can take it, he's responding to her message he's not the one that's initiated the conversation, and if it's not going to go any further there's no need to gain access to the e-mails*'. Foden's behaviour was recognised as '*inappropriate*'. LA1 Senior Manager Ed2 was concerned about this particularly since Foden had only been at the school for about a month at that time. There was no attempt to pursue the matter further in order to gain access to Foden's emails despite this option having been considered; the Review has seen evidence that Foden continued to message Child G and was on occasion the initial instigator of contact.

This was a missed opportunity

11 November 2021 Foden hit local, regional and national headlines and caused considerable social media debate and discussion regarding his proposal to refuse school dinners to pupils whose parents were more than 2p in debt to the school. LA1 was forced to make a public apology to parents.

12 November 2021 a meeting was convened with LA1 Director of Social Services, LA1 Head of Education 1, LA1 Corporate Services and LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO to brief on an issue of unreasonable force being investigated by NWP and LA1 C&FS under Section 5. Video footage of the incident seemed to suggest that excessive force and unrecognised techniques were used by Foden in dealing with a situation involving Child I, who had diagnosed ALN. NWP were considering whether a crime had been committed and if not, whether there would be a need for consideration of whether this was acceptable professional behaviour. There is no reference to any risk assessments being agreed on or completed as a result of the Section 5 process.

It was agreed at the meeting on 12 November 2021 that a recommendation should be made for the Chair of Governors to suspend Foden from his role at Ysgol Friars as a neutral act pending investigation. It was acknowledged that ultimately this would

be a decision for the Chair of Governors. The Senior LA1 Officers (see above) at the meeting were unsure why this had not already been considered under part 7 of the Governor Handbook's suspension policy (the link to [LA1 Governor Handbook](#) has since been removed). Discussion between LA1 Head of Education 1, NWP and the Chair of Governors regarding Foden's suspension resulted in Foden being instructed to work from home rather than be suspended. The Chair of Governors at School 2 was not involved in this discussion and therefore could not assess transferable risk to pupils in School 2.

This was a missed opportunity

During the formal investigation there was extensive discussion around the detail of the degree of force used in the restraint. A heavy reliance was put on the NWP view that a criminal threshold had not been met, and on Foden's own statement (strongly supported by DSP 2) that the restraint was within government guidance and followed school policy. The Chair of Governors had not been involved in this process, although he should have been, had national guidance been followed³.

12 November 2021 a further incident triggered a referral, this time made by Child J in School 2, who alleged assault caused by the use of unreasonable force by Foden against him. Child J had been in the wrong classroom and had refused to move, remaining seated instead. Foden proceeded to lift Child J by his armpit and drag him from the chair and out of the room. This matter '*did not progress under Section 3 nor (was it deemed to) meet the threshold for a Section 5.*' A decision that no further action would be taken was based in part on Foden's assertion that he had followed guidance. LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO stated

'we understand he did this under the reasonable force procedures, and the practices viewed in the footage are general within schools under such circumstance'.

The Reviewers contend that this is not the case and is in breach of the fundamental principles of national guidance i.e. that restrictive practices should only be used as a last resort and should be proportional to the situation.

On 15 November 2021 Foden responded to the notification that he had been subject to a Section 5 Strategy Discussion, agreeing that he had given his email address to Child G but denying that he had ever hugged her. Foden also denied having sent emails to Child G late at night but attached a copy of an email that Child G had sent to him. Foden stated that he would not email Child G again. This was taken at face value and not monitored. The Review has seen evidence of considerable continuing email contact with Child G, sometimes late at night. It was noted that '*someone from Education*' would contact Foden to discuss some professional matters related to the referral and that Foden would have the opportunity to correct any '*misinterpretation*' of his actions.

³ <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/safe-and-effective-intervention-use-of-reasonable-force-and-searching-for-weapons.pdf>

Neither the Chair of Governors of School 2, nor the Chair of Governors at Ysgol Friars were invited to the Section 5 Professional Strategy Discussion. Both Chairs could have been contacted in order to gain a better understanding of the concerns being raised and to aid in any assessment regarding whether there was a transferable risk to pupils at Ysgol Friars.

This was a missed opportunity

On 15 November 2021 Foden was instructed by the Chair of Governors at Ysgol Friars to work from home. This instruction applied to both Ysgol Friars and School 2 and was in response to the complaint about restraint. The restraint and safeguarding issues were not considered together.

This was a missed opportunity

On 18 November 2021 the BBC reported Foden's claims in the press that he had been '*thrown under the bus*' by LA1 who had instructed him to make the changes in School Dinner policy. Foden claimed that as a consequence he had received threats and abuse. It was reported to this Review that Foden had said to another professional that he had '*even been called a paedophile*' and when asked why that might be had said he got '*called all sorts of names*'.

On 21 November 2021 Foden received an email from the Chair of Governors to state that the restrictions had been lifted and that he was free to return to Ysgol Friars from 22 November 2021. Foden did not return to school at that time and there is evidence of DSP 2 seeking advice from LA1 Ed1 about what he could relay to staff about Foden's continuing absence.

In January 2022 Foden returned to work at both schools.

On 10 January 2022, there was general email discussion between Foden and LA1 Head of Education 1, with reference made to communication with the LA1 referrals team and Designated Lead Officer for Safeguarding Children in Education about whether a [second] referral was necessary in relation to Child G, School 2. Foden reported to LA1 Head of Education 1 that he did not interpret advice received from this referrals team as indicating the need for a Section 5. There is an indication that the Designated Lead Officer for Safeguarding Children in Education suggested there **was** a need for a referral and that Foden should not be told. In the event Foden was subsequently informed about the concerns but no further information relating to process and outcome has been shared with the Reviewers, despite requests having been made.

On 11 January 2022 a Section 5 Professional Strategy Meeting on the Child I restraint case concluded that whilst a criminal threshold had not been met, Foden's reaction was disproportionate; physical intervention should be the ultimate last

resort. It was clear from the footage that there was minimal effort to defuse the situation with Foden leaning authoritatively over the pupil as he lay on the floor. The case was closed with no further action, but with recommendations made to the Chair of Governors and to Education, including to review the Restraint Policy in light of new guidance and to review the use of mobile phones by staff to record incidents. A part 3 S.47 meeting had found that the threshold of significant harm had not been met although Child 1 was very distressed.

On 14 January 2022 School 2 contacted LA1 Head of Education 1 having been told by Child G that Foden had been in contact with her again requesting to see her. The school requested feedback following their earlier referral on whether the outcome on their Child G concerns had concluded, specifically regarding further contact between Foden and Child G, since they had not been informed of any of the procedures followed nor conclusions reached*⁴ since making the referral in October 2021. In response School 2 was advised by LA1 Team Leader C&FS, via LA1 Ed3, that there was nothing to stop Foden from meeting with Child G, that the earlier referral had concluded with no need for direct action, but that the Head of Year should be informed of meetings. This latter point was communicated verbally but there appears to be no written record of this advice. LA1 Team Leader C&FS also quoted from the Section 5 Professional Strategy Discussion notes that Child G [should be asked if she] is happy to meet with Foden (*Child's Voice*).

Deputy Head DSP School 2 told Reviewers that Child G was unhappy at the prospect of having to meet Foden which was the reason that the school safeguarding leads were concerned that Foden had contacted Child G again to ask to meet.

On 1 February 2022 Foden was reported, in email discussion between LA1 Head of Education 1, Gov 3, Senior School 2 staff and LA1 Senior Manager Ed2, to have used restrictive practices again, this time against a KS4 boy, Child H, who had exhibited challenging behaviour. The Reviewers have seen reference in emails to an HS11 form, evidence that this incident related to another restraint case, this being the fourth in as many months, where restrictive practices were used by Foden. Although ensuing discussion involved the Chair of Governors, NWP, LA1 Ed, LA1 C&FS, it was decided in discussion between the Education Department and the Chair of Governors that the matter would be dealt with by the school. This decision was made prior to any referral having been made to and assessed by LA1 C&FS. A referral was made on 2 February 2022. A Section 5 Strategy Discussion attended by Education, and NWP investigation concluded on 16 February where it was agreed that the threshold to proceed had not been met and there were no grounds for further steps to be taken under safeguarding procedures.

⁴ The Review has seen evidence that both LA1 Head of Ed1 and LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO had separately informed Chair of Governors School 1 of the outcome of the Child G (School 2) referral, and although reference is made to LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO having also sent a letter to Gov 3, School 2, evidence of such has not been shared with nor seen by the Review. The Review has seen no evidence of a response to an email request from LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO to LA1 Senior Manager Ed2, Later Head of Education 2 for Gov 3's address.

By September 2022 DSP 2 had noticed that there was

"a gradual increase in the number of female pupils that Foden would see for his so-called counselling / therapy sessions"

In October 2022 during a meeting attended by staff members, a social worker and a carer for Child F, concerns were raised about the frequency with which Child F was visiting Foden alone in his room. A staff member emailed Foden to advise him against having Child F in his room and that the carer had commented on this.

In November 2022 Foden allegedly sexually assaulted a female adult on school premises.

In January 2023 DSP 2 stated that concerns about Foden had been raised by other staff in Ysgol Friars and in particular by other members of the Core SMT. DSP 2 stated that at this time he had discussed these concerns with Foden including noting that the location of his office was isolated with 2 closed doors from the corridor. No referral was made to LA1 C&FS.

This was a missed opportunity

On 27th March 2023 Core SMT 1 & 3 and DSP 2 discussed their ongoing concerns about Foden. Social media messages seen by the Reviewers contain the following

*I popped in to see the head about [member of staff]. Had to ask to see him in your room as [Child D] was in there and they were by the window'
Now she's got in his car, he's taking her home I assume*

Response

*It's ridiculous. Spends half his time in school now holding hands with little girls. Taking them home is dodgy at best, suspicious even. What gratification is he getting? What are they doing in private?
I think you, [DSP 2] and I need a meeting off site*

Response

I am glad you agree, I feel really worried

Core SMT 1 asked DSP 2 to refer the concerns to LA1 C&FS. No referral was made to LA1 C&FS.

This was a missed opportunity

30 March 2023 Core SMT 1, DSP 2 and Core SMT 3 noted in correspondence that pupils and staff were making comments about Foden. DSP 2 refers to being in the same situation that they had been in when Core SMT 1 made his previous report in April 2019. The Core SMT note that

'events at [another North Wales school] have shown that a CP concern can take out a whole SMT, so this is no longer about him, it will affect the careers of all of us if we fail to report a concern'.

On 30 March 2023 DSP 2 was asked by Core SMT 1 and Core SMT 3 to make a referral to LA1 C&FS but DSP 2 again declined to do so in favour of giving Foden another chance. Instead DSP 2 sent Foden an email alerting him to the Core SMT concerns and requesting that he changed his approach to seeing vulnerable female pupils alone in his room. No referral was made to LA1 C&FS.

This was a missed opportunity

The content of the email sent on 30 March 2023 from DSP 2 was framed in terms of perceived risk to Foden. It includes, amongst other similar suggestions, that Foden's office door should be part open, lights should be on, and blinds open to allow pupils to be visible, and that pupils should not be seen outside of school hours. The email concludes that

'Given your position in school, your experience and safeguarding role, there is a lot to digest. I understand the conflict in some of what I have suggested but my concern is that, given the number of highly vulnerable, less than trustworthy pupils you see you are placing yourself at risk by continuing to see pupils alone in the way that you are. I also wonder about pupils you are not seeing making up rumours about those girls seeing you. What if one pupil you're seeing feels pushed aside because someone else is being seen more frequently? Will they make something up because one girl gets cups of tea but they don't?'

The content of this email confirms that it was known to Core SMT 1 & 3 and DSP 2 that Foden saw female pupils alone in his office, for extended periods of time, with the door shut, lights off and blinds down, and that he should no longer do this. The reference to '*less than trustworthy pupil*' when referring to some of the most vulnerable children in the school underscores the culture which Foden had instilled in the school.

Foden responded agreeing to some of the suggestions but not to all. Core SMT also held an in-person meeting with Foden to discuss the situation.

On 31 March 2023 DSP 2 emailed Foden saying that he had been uncomfortable in the meeting [of the four of them] and stated:

'All I want to do is make sure that you're safe, that your reputation is secure and that we continue to work together to make this school even more successful.'

No referral was made to LA1 C&FS by any of Core SMT.

On 18 April 2023 a further social media message states

'He's had [Child D] in there this morning, there's another one in there now'

making it clear that Foden's behaviour had not changed as a result of either the visit or the email sent to him by Core SMT.

This was a missed opportunity and evidence of a failure of professional duty to report safeguarding concerns

On 28th April there are further social media exchanges between members of Core SMT. DSP 2 had again seen Child D in Foden's office, on this occasion after 5pm. He states

'when I walked in he was next to her stood against the wall facing the far wall. I spoke to him about her being there.....I worry that he just doesn't get it. He says they were just discussing art, but I don't get why they should be there until 5. It's a backward step'

Response

'.....he has seen a number of girls during lesson times this week as well, [Child B] several times, [Child D]..... and others. There is also a new [x] girl. I don't think much has changed tbh. He just doesn't seem to be able to let them go and pass them on to professionals'

Response from DSP 2

'.....I am worried that if there is an accusation we have more and more evidence that will harm him rather than defend him'

No referral was made to LA1 C&FS by any of Core SMT 1, DSP 2 or Core SMT 3.

This was a missed opportunity and evidence of a failure of professional duty to report safeguarding concerns

In June 2023 a member of staff at Ysgol Friars raised concerns internally with DSP 2 and Core SMT 3 regarding Foden's interactions with Child F.

On 28 June 2023 documents seen by the Reviewers evidence that DSP 2 had met with Foden socially and spoken to him again about the concerns, in particular in relation to Child D. DSP 2 had pointed out that Child D was very vulnerable and that Foden was spending too much time with her, conducting his '*therapy sessions*'. DSP 2 recalls that he had become increasingly aware that Child D was attending Foden's office on a regular basis. DSP 2 also stated that at this time he was aware

that Foden was seeing Child D outside school hours and was '*placing himself in unnecessary danger*'.

DSP 2 described Child D as

'probably the most vulnerable pupil in school' noting that at that time, her attendance '*was all over the place, she missed more than half her lessons due to absence*'.

DSP 2 stated

'I was actually relieved when the academic year had come to an end and it was a weight off my mind, as Child D would not be frequenting Foden's office, at least through the summer holidays'.

Once again, an assumption was made that if Foden and a pupil were not in school there could be no interaction between them. This was despite DSP 2 having stated that he was aware at this time that Foden was seeing Child D outside of school hours.

This was a missed opportunity and evidence of a failure of professional duty to report safeguarding concerns

On the 3 July 2023 carer of Child F contacted Children's Services out of hours team in regard to their concerns about Foden. Records state:

'The carer reported having had a conversation with Child F, who had opened up about her feelings towards Foden'. The carer reported that Child F 'found Foden's attention comforting and thinks nobody else gets the same treatment. Foden makes her a cup of tea and sends a message to the canteen to prepare food for her. Child F had many google photos of Foden on her phone'.

It was noted by the carer that Child F was infatuated with Foden.

Discussion among the social work team resulted in a decision that the threshold for a Section 5 meeting was not met but that further information was required and that a meeting should be held between child's home authority Children's Services and Ysgol Friars.

This was a missed opportunity

On 7 July 2023 a meeting re Child F was held in Ysgol Friars with her social worker and school staff present. It was reported that Child F was frequently going to Foden's room and often missing lessons. The social worker arranged to meet with Child F

separately. The social worker was told that staff had spoken to Foden previously about not seeing Child F alone.

The social worker met with Child F in the school and Child F disclosed that she was still going to see Foden in his office. The social worker recorded that following the meeting in the school, Child F contacted her at the weekend and confirmed that she had never stopped meeting Foden. Child F told the social worker that Foden made her feel special, that he said she was '*important to him*' and that they had '*things in common*'. Child F said that she got special treatment. Foden was a good listener and had time for her. The social worker then met with Child F again and she disclosed that Foden had hugged her, and she found this uncomfortable. Child F also stated that she had not given permission for the hug.

On 24 July 2023 the social worker made a referral to LA1 C&FS containing the information Child F had disclosed and noted in the referral that Foden had previously been asked not to have unsupervised time with Child F due to concerns around the professional relationship.

By this time the school summer holidays had started. Emails between LA1 CF&S and the child's home authority continued to be exchanged throughout this period. and ultimately, senior managers also became involved.

On 25 July 2023 LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO, wrote a response to the social worker requesting clarification of the content of the referral. This was to be forwarded to her but was not sent until 2 August 2023.

On 8 August 2023 the referral was updated by the social worker as requested by LA1 C&FS. LA1 deny having received it at this time. In ongoing correspondence between the two authority's Children's Services, on and following 18 August, the need for a s.47 investigation/ Section 3/ 5 Strategy Discussion was raised re Position of Trust involving Child F.

Email exchanges between these two authorities continued throughout the summer holidays- the apparent assumption being that as it was the holidays, the child would be safe.

On 23 August, LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO responded to the other Authority, explaining

'.... if [they] called a Section 5 Meeting and was unhappy about the [level of clarity in the referral] information, he'd call in the Team Manager from that authority as well and wanted to avoid cross Authority tension if possible.'

On 5 September 2023 **nine** weeks after original concerns were referred and LA1 C&FS were first notified of the concerns relating to Child F, Foden's interactions with Child F were still under discussion and no decision had been made about whether a Section 5 Professional Strategy Meeting should be held.

Child F's safety over the summer had not been considered. It subsequently became apparent that Foden had continued to abuse Child D throughout the summer holiday.

On 6 September 2023 at the start of the school day Child D disclosed that she had been '*in a romantic relationship*' with Foden and showed WhatsApp messages and photos to a member of the pastoral team and DDSP. The messages were of a sexual nature and indicated that a crime had probably been committed. Messages on Child D's phone were identified as being from Foden's number. At around 10.45 DDSP phoned LA1 C&FS and described the content of the messages. DDSP was asked to send in all relevant information without delay. Section 3 and 5 Strategy Discussions and a joint s.47 were subsequently triggered to coordinate matters and agree a way forward. These meetings began only after digital evidence had been received by LA1 C&FS at 11:55.

Although the Review has not seen evidence of this, it is understood that LA1 Head of Ed1 was informed by phone of the disclosure by LA1 SMT 1 before C&FS were informed.

The Review has been informed by the DDSP and Child D, that whilst the referral was being made Child D was hidden in a cupboard in the school. Foden remained on the premises and tried to gain access to her. At 11.53 NWP CRU were alerted by LA1 C&FS that the referral had been received. At 12.21 the DDSP also contacted NWP. At approximately 2.30pm Foden was arrested.

On 8 September 2023 a Section 5 Professional Strategy Meeting was held to '*bring matters into process*'. The Chair of Governors did not attend the meeting as he considered that there was a conflict in this matter between his role as Chair of Governors and his professional position in NWP. DSP 2 was nominated by the Chair of Governors to attend the Section 5 meeting in his place. This was not an appropriate substitution as DSP 2 had no authority to make decisions regarding Foden, and the request should have been that Gov 2 or another member of the Governing Body should attend. However, the Chair of Governors decision was accepted by the Chair of the meeting LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO and DSP 2 was in attendance.

In the Section 5 meeting on 8 September 2023 the Chair made no reference to, or held any discussion about any of the previous Section 5 Professional Strategy Meetings that had been held about Foden in relation to concerns that had been raised regarding either his interactions with vulnerable female pupils or concerns about Foden's use of force with male pupils. The outstanding request (ongoing since early July 2023) that a Section 5 Professional Strategy Meeting should be held in regard to Foden's interactions with Child F was not referred to. Several officers attending the meeting on 8 September had attended at least some of these Section 5 meetings and would therefore have known the context of the meetings and that Foden's conduct had been a matter of concern for a number of years.

On 10 September 2023 (a Sunday), Core SMT 3 contacted LA1 Head of Education 1 by telephone. Core SMT 3 disclosed that Core SMT 1, 3 and DSP 2 had discussed their shared concerns about Foden at the end of the Spring Term (see March 2023 above). Although not disclosed by SMT 3 to LA1 Head of Education 1 in this conversation, the Review has seen evidence that Core SMT had been discussing similar concerns amongst themselves throughout the period since 2019 when SMT 1 had initially contacted LA1 Head of Education 1 with concerns about Foden, without seeking advice or making a referral.

As a result of this conversation LA 1 Head of Education 1 sent an urgent WhatsApp message to the Chief Executive.

WhatsApp:

LA1 Head of Education 1 to LA 1 Chief Executive

10.9 23, 15:53:

'Hi XX X I've just received a phone call from Core SMT 3 assoc. head Friars. A call that raises significant concern for me about the culture, this incident and the behaviour of the SMT. Welcome to phone me if you'd like to know more before tomorrow'.

LA1 Chief Executive responded

'[you] need to tell them that any information about the case needs to be shared with the referrals team or Police'

The CPR team have not been able to evidence whether LA 1 Head of Education 1 himself called for an urgent meeting the next day (11th September) or whether there was already a meeting of senior officers arranged for that day. The Stat Dir SS was present and took notes but there are not formal minutes of the meeting.

The meeting convened on 11 September 2023 was attended by LA1 Stat Dir SS, LA1 Chief Executive, LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO, LA1 Legal, LA1 Head C&FS, LA1 Head of Education 1, LA1 Senior Manager Ed2 (later LA1 Head of Education 2). Four of these Officers had been at the meeting convened in 2019 to discuss SMT 1's concerns about Foden.

At this meeting LA1 Head of Education 1 was able to report on the content of the call he had received from Core SMT 3 the day before, including the detail of the disclosure that Core SMT 1, 3 and DSP 2 had shared amongst themselves their serious concerns about Foden's repeated meetings with vulnerable female pupils alone in his office. The meeting was informed that DSP 2, rather than notify LA1 of these concerns as requested by SMT 1 and 3, had emailed Foden

'warning him that there could be a malicious allegation on its way and that he'd need to be ready for that'

and that in addition

'[Core SMT 1, 3 and DSP 2] decided to meet with Foden to warn him, without contacting the Council, Governors nor anyone else'.

Officers at the meeting commented that safeguarding procedures in regard to reporting safeguarding concerns to LA1 had not been followed by Core SMT 1, 3 and DSP 2 but did not recognise that they had also specifically breached Section 130 of the [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014](#) which requires 'relevant

partners' for example teachers to inform the local authority if they have reasonable cause to suspect a child is at risk of harm. This includes cases of abuse, neglect, or other forms of harm.

Nor did officers refer to *Keeping Learners Safe 2022* which makes it clear that schools and colleges must not carry out their own investigations. *Keeping Learners Safe 2022* sets out that if the concern is about a member of staff, schools and colleges must report it to the local authority or the police. This in turn was a breach by Core SMT 1, 3 and DSP 2 of the Code of Professional Conduct and Practice for Registrants with the Education Workforce Council (EWC), the teacher's regulatory body.

Whilst it was noted in the meeting that

'It would therefore be appropriate that none of these three internals become acting head',

those present at the meeting on 11 September 2023 did not discuss that the failure of any or all of Core SMT 1, 3 and DSP 2 (together or severally) to report their significant safeguarding concerns about Foden to LA1 C&FS had left pupils at risk of abuse by Foden and furthermore called their suitability to work with children into question.

The failure of all three to report the concerns should have been a trigger to call for consideration of each of those individual's suitability to work with children under a Section 5 Professional Strategy Meeting, particularly given that the three were the senior leaders of the school and that one of them was actually the Designated Person for Safeguarding. Holding such meetings could have resulted in referrals to the EWC for breach of professional standards and failure to safeguard children with consequent disciplinary action.

The Reviewers have seen evidence that subsequent to the 11 September meeting LA1 Chief Executive and LA1 Stat Dir SS did seek reassurance from NWP Gold Command that the Core SMT were not criminally involved with Foden or persons of interest to the criminal investigation, and reassurance was given by NWP that if criminal activity was suspected or found, Section 5 procedures would be invoked.

A recurrent theme of this Review has been the absence of consideration of 'suitability to work with children' both when making decisions about invoking the Section 5 process, and in any subsequent Section 5 Professionals Strategy Meetings.

Wales Safeguarding Procedures suggests that the procedures should be invoked where an individual has

- Contravened or continued to contravene their agency's Safeguarding Policy and Procedures

And goes on to advise that professionals should

- Consider whether the adult's suitability to continue working with children or adults at risk in his or her current position has been called into question

- Consider whether there are disciplinary issues to be followed up

On 14 September 2023 there was an extraordinary meeting of the Governing Body with senior officers from LA1. LA1 Stat Dir SS and LA1 Head of Education 1 were in attendance.

In spite of the recognition by senior officials at LA1 that none of Core SMT should become acting head of Ysgol Friars, and the Review understands that the Governing Body were advised of this, Core SMT 1, 3 and DSP 2 all remained in senior leadership positions, including in the DSP role at Ysgol Friars for a further academic year.

The Review has not seen evidence of how the decision for Core SMT including the DSP to stay in place was reached. This left pupils at Ysgol Friars vulnerable.

Practice and organisational learning

Identify each individual learning point arising in this case (including highlighting effective practice) accompanied by a brief outline of the relevant circumstances

Themes and Recommendations

Foden's sexual abuse of female pupils

This Review was commissioned in response to Foden's sexual offending against female pupils at the school where he had been Headteacher for a number of decades. During the course of the review, it became clear that Foden was a sophisticated and opportunistic predator who had developed his strategy for sexual offending undetected over a long period of time. Foden had cultivated and refined an environment where, by normalising his behaviours and by abusing his power and position of trust, he was able to make himself inviolable to challenge and thus able to offend in plain sight.

Concerns had been openly discussed by Core SMT as early as March 2019 and by January 2022 DSP 2 noted that Foden was having increasingly frequent contact with vulnerable female pupils in his office and that staff and pupils were commenting on this. In March 2023 concerns were again discussed amongst Core SMT, and Foden was warned about his behaviour. That notwithstanding, in June 2023 Foden was known to be seeing '*the most vulnerable girl in the school*' both in his office and out of school but no intervention was made.

This was a missed opportunity

Foden's physical abuse of male pupils

However, whilst by no means minimising the extent, duration and impact of Foden's sexual abuse of vulnerable female pupils, a second theme to emerge from this Review is the evidence of considerable and repeated abuse of power and position of trust in Foden's physical interventions with young male pupils. Of particular concern was Foden's repeated and public use of restrictive processes and unorthodox methods of restraint when '*managing*' the behaviour of male pupils at the school. As with his sexual offending, Foden's actions in this respect were normalised and carried out in plain sight.

The sexual and physical abuse of children are not unrelated and from what is known of each of them, may each have had both sexual and sadistic motivation. Each situation involved Foden's abuse of power and position of trust in relation to children in conjunction with the grooming and manipulation of other adults- both professionals and family- who may otherwise have protected the children. Foden normalised his

actions and thus persuaded those around him to believe that his interventions in both providing 1:1 ‘counselling’ for female pupils and ‘managing the behaviour’ of male pupils were reasonable, proportionate and warranted. Foden’s actions have doubtless resulted in long-term impact on those who were subjected to his behaviour and became the cultural norm for some of his staff.

The Recommendations put forward in this Review are inter-dependent and cannot be taken piecemeal. A strategic and integrated response from all agencies which work with children is required to ensure, as far as is possible, that this type of abuse is not experienced in the future.

Theme 1: Impact of Status, Reputation and Culture

For almost three decades Foden was the Headteacher of the largest most high-profile school in LA1. During this time, Foden had deliberately and strategically distanced himself and Ysgol Friars from Local Authority oversight by developing his own Standard Operating Procedures. Foden also adapted the Local authority exemplar policies for safeguarding to suit himself and contracted out HR arrangements to a commercial provider. Foden also deliberately developed a safeguarding system staffed by inexperienced and weak staff who felt unable or ill-equipped to challenge him.

In addition to being a Headteacher, Foden also had status locally, regionally and nationally, courting local and national media. He was the BBC’s ‘go to’ person for comment on controversial issues relating to education. Foden also involved himself in matters of national policy, speaking at the Senedd on education matters.

Foden actively familiarised himself with the operating systems of statutory agencies and safeguarding support systems and was blatant in his thirst for information which he could then use to thwart anyone who sought to challenge him. For example, he attended the SARC (see appendix 1) to learn of its work and sought information on the operation of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). In addition, Foden was perceived to have an almost encyclopaedic knowledge of statutory guidance in the fields of education, unions and employment law. Foden was also reported to have been happy to fabricate or bluff in a forceful and ‘knowledgeable way’ where he felt the need, giving the impression of authenticity. He was described as broadcasting information ‘as if he was the messiah’.

Foden was unafraid of challenge or scrutiny.

Culture

Foden had a reputation as a disciplinarian who intimidated and bullied pupils, staff and parents, and who would target and pursue individuals if they crossed him. Foden cultivated a climate of fear as one of his manipulation strategies; he was both ruthless and vindictive. This fear was so pervasive that contributors to this Review expressed

their concern that Foden would pursue them when released from prison- if not sooner- either directly or through a perceived network of allies/ supporters. Contributors continued to be afraid for their jobs, their mental health and general wellbeing.

Foden encouraged a culture of misogyny amongst staff, treating male and female staff differently. He openly engaged in conversations which included explicit sexual content, often at the expense of female staff, and he made comments of a sexual nature to both individuals and groups at work and in social events. Foden caused discord in his wider SMT by playing members off against each other, again often at the expense of his female staff.

The Reviewers have seen evidence that this culture of sexual conversation and innuendo was so embedded and normalised that even when Core SMT 1 contacted DSP 2 on 6 September 2023 to inform him that Foden had been arrested, DSP 2 recalled that

'I initially thought that it was some sort of inappropriate joke'.

Women were not given the same opportunities as men, and Foden often used his power over contractual arrangements to intimidate or control his staff, for example only offering employees short term contracts with the implied or explicit threat that they may not be renewed and changing employee responsibilities within roles without consultation or agreement.

Foden advocated a distrust of children, and actively promoted the belief that children are dishonest and would likely make false allegations. Foden simultaneously assured staff that he would *'have their back'* if an allegation was made against them by a child, and he circulated messages to staff that named and deliberately undermined the credibility of children. This included deliberately and openly naming those children who he was later found to have abused, and who he was seeing on a 1:1 basis as particularly untrustworthy. Staff were not encouraged to believe children, and parents who raised concerns or complaints about the school or the way in which their children were being handled were given short shrift if they tried to pursue this line (see Theme 5: Governance and Complaints).

Despite this and having been found guilty of professional misconduct by the EWC in Autumn of 2020 which led to a two-year reprimand, there is little evidence of anyone in LA1 or on the Governing Body having management oversight or monitoring his behaviour or of many of the actions and recommendations included in the EWC outcome being implemented.

On 21 June 2022 only nine months after the EWC finding of professional misconduct, Foden was appointed as Executive/Strategic Head of School 2. Foden drafted his own job description/ contract for this executive role, and rather than being accountable to School 2's Governing Body was to be managed by LA1 Head of Education 1. Foden exploited the opportunity of working across two sites to disguise his whereabouts; no one had access to his diary or knew when he would next be at either school, although one of his victims was able to share that she knew of Foden's whereabouts with school staff. The fact that a pupil had this knowledge of Foden's whereabouts did not appear to raise concerns.

This was a missed opportunity

Foden was a strategic sex offender who was also opportunistic and determined. He acted in *plain sight*. Foden created an environment which enabled him to develop systems and create opportunities to access any child almost at will and then manipulated those systems to normalise his 1:1 access to vulnerable female pupils. Whilst there is evidence that Foden's offending pre-dated the death of DSP 1 in 2018, DSP 1's passing opened up an opportunity for Foden to step into a position where he could identify and access the most vulnerable children and abuse them under the guise of offering pastoral support.

Foden played on his personal loss of DSP1 (who he had described as being his '*best friend*') at a time when many other staff and pupils were also grieving, thus gaining sympathy of both his peers and victims. Foden presented as being a man in deep mourning who was stepping in when the school community was in a state of shock, and Foden's public display of grief for the loss of his friend certainly added credence to his taking on the pastoral role.

When anybody reported a concern about Foden's contact with vulnerable female pupils both he and the professionals working with him cited offering counselling support as the *prima facie* reason for his having 1:1 contact with pupils. When, in due course, Foden's behaviour was considered in strategy discussions or the Section 5 process, other professionals unquestioningly fell into the trap of believing that Foden was supporting and counselling pupils. No one stood back to question whether Foden was appropriately trained in this field, whether it was appropriate for the headteacher of a school to be carrying out this work, or why the '*counselling*' was only offered to female pupils.

For the remainder of 2018 until the appointment of DSP 2 in early 2019 the school had no trained safeguarding lead or DSP. The void was filled by the office manager acting as a deputy DSP under the supervision of Foden. The office manager was not a trained professional and was inexperienced in this context, having only had a role supporting DSP 1 as chaperone; she received no formal safeguarding training until December 2018.

At the beginning of the 2018-2019 academic year Foden oversaw a restructuring of the pastoral system in Ysgol Friars, replacing trained education staff who had been Heads of Year with inexperienced teaching assistants and administrative staff. This was presented to the staff body as a plan created by DSP1 (who the Reviewers contend had also been appointed by Foden for his lack of experience and potential malleability) and now brought to fruition. The new system gave Foden further opportunity to control the safeguarding process and gave him access to information which enabled him to identify pupils at risk. During this time Foden was also able to appoint an inadequately trained and inexperienced Deputy Head to replace DSP1, to lead on pastoral work and hold the role of DSP 2. DSP 2 was not able to access a suitable level of safeguarding training until well into his first term at Ysgol Friars and had joined with little relevant experience of this area of work.

By 2019 Foden was known to be having frequent meetings with vulnerable female pupils alone in his office and had normalised this behaviour, often emailing members of staff to ask them to release certain female pupils from their lessons. Foden openly directed staff to misuse the School Information Management System (SIMS) by requesting that staff mark pupils as present in their lessons when in fact the pupils were with Foden in his office. By taking the approach of asking for the same pupils to be allowed to be absent from a variety of lessons and subjects, Foden was able to conceal any pattern of regular or frequent absence of any particular pupil from classroom teachers and departmental heads.

In April 2019 Core SMT 1 raised concern with LA1 Head of Education 1 about the frequency of Foden's lone meetings with vulnerable female pupils. When Foden was informed of these discussions he responded in two ways; the first was to cold shoulder Core SMT 1, his Deputy Head, for an extended period of time, and the second was to actively announce, for example in morning staff briefings, that he would be supporting named female pupil 'X' in his office that day. In this way Foden was able to continue to operate in plain sight and without challenge.

This was not the only example of Foden flouting his own rules at the school. During Covid lockdowns in 2020 Foden was able to determine who had access to the school and invited victims to meet him alone there, which meant simultaneously breaching Covid regulations and school procedures. This was remarked on via WhatsApp exchanges amongst the Core SMT, but they did not challenge him or seek advice having been met with a very negative response on previous occasions.

Foden also actively managed the school Governing Body (discussed in detail under Theme 5: Governance and Complaints). The Review has seen evidence that Foden drafted written responses in regard to procedures brought against him for the Chair of Governors to submit under his own name to LA1 Head of Education 1. In these letters Foden, via the Chair of Governors, challenged the application of policy and procedure. For example, based on advice from Foden and DSP 2, the Chair of Governors, when advised by senior officers LA1 Director C&FS, LA1 Head of Education 1, LA1 Head C&FS, LA1 Former Corp Dir and LA1 Legal to suspend Foden as a neutral act, refused to do so, instructing Foden instead to work from home. The Review has seen evidence that these senior staff believed that the school policy stated that NWP must have oversight of and agree to matters relating to the Headteacher's suspension. The Review has not been able to evidence that the policy was in fact changed in this regard, however, the Review contends that, on the balance of probability, Foden had fabricated and promoted this falsehood to mislead other professionals at a time when he was facing not only two allegations of using unreasonable force in restraining young male pupils (one instance in each of the schools in which he was Headteacher) and a third allegation relating to his interactions with Child G, a female pupil, described later in this Review.

Once appointed to the Executive/Strategic Headship of School 2 Foden moved swiftly to use his new position to identify and target a vulnerable female pupil. Using the same *modus operandi* as he had used in Ysgol Friars, i.e. under the guise of supporting a pupil, Foden isolated Child G, insisted that she came to his office alone and frequently messaged her at her private email address, even late at night. This was

noted by school staff and reported to LA1 C&FS. Child G had reported her concerns to staff, asking them to intervene but was told they felt unable to as '*he was [their] boss*'.

At this time Foden also came to the attention of LA1 C&FS for his physical interventions with pupils and strict application of disciplinary procedures in both schools. Ysgol Friars had the highest level of permanent exclusions in LA1 and relatively low levels of short-term exclusions. He operated a '*three strikes and you're out*' Policy which was endorsed and supported by the Governors, staff and by some parents.

Professionals were also unable to objectify Foden's conduct when he acted under the guise of offering personal and pastoral support to pupils. In this way Foden was able to infiltrate child safeguarding organisations and systems, learn how they operated and further isolate his female victims from other supportive adults.

Whilst identifying and targeting vulnerable female pupils for sexual abuse, Foden was subject to complaints and referrals in relation to his application of restrictive practice and use of inappropriate force against male pupils. Pupils and their parents were afraid of swift action and reprisals should they make a complaint, and few complaints resulted in action being taken by LA1. Fear of exclusion and other consequences impacted on family tolerance of this behaviour.

One member of staff commented to this Review that Foden would corner and taunt male pupils until they reacted, at which point he would physically intervene and/or trigger a formal reprimand. School staff and parents have alleged the targeted victimisation of some pupils, who by this means then faced an accelerated accumulation of negative behaviour points until an exclusion threshold was triggered. A staff member observed to the Reviewers that '*within a day a child's secondary education could be over*'.

Foden's perceived standing in the community combined with his reputation as a man who would bully staff, pupils and parents made adults afraid to challenge him and unable to view his actions objectively. At the same time Foden advertised and exploited his power over staff working in the school and living in the community by threatening the loss of jobs or keeping staff on short contracts. Pupils and parents faced the threat of exclusion and removal from the school roll. Foden refused to engage with complainants who did not comply with his rules. Some of these actions had been legitimised by their inclusion in the school policy. In other cases, rules in the policy were flouted.

A stark conclusion of this Review was that professional adults working in the school did not stop to consider why a man wielding such status and power in his employment as leader of a school with 1400 pupils on roll would dedicate the time or have the inclination to offer personal and pastoral support to some of the most vulnerable female pupils, nor to consider the appropriateness of his doing so as a male member of staff, untrained in this area.

Professionals had become used to and normalised Foden seeing vulnerable female pupils on site and out of school, but despite this still failed to consider that his behaviour would continue though the school holidays, instead believing contact would

cease during these times. The Reviewers have seen evidence that in the cases of Child A, D and F decisions not to act were made on the mistaken assumption that Foden would not meet with them during school holidays. In one case it was even suggested that Foden might amend his behaviour by the time the new term began and therefore not present a risk going forward. The Reviewers are aware that the abuse did not stop during school holidays.

This was a missed opportunity

The fact that Foden only saw vulnerable female pupils in his room and did not offer the same support to male pupils had also become normalised and remained unremarked upon at the time, although DSP 2 did note it retrospectively.

Each of these examples demonstrate the skill with which Foden was able to groom not only his victims but also the wider community in which he worked.

Had professionals from all agencies coming into contact with Foden and the school had training regarding the *modus operandi* of sex offenders it is likely that they would have recognised and responded to indicators of grooming and coercive control in Foden's behaviours. As it was, Foden skilfully manipulated the community into compliance with his policies and misuse of power.

Theme 2: Reporting Concerns, Managing Allegations, Making Referrals - systems and processes

Reviewers have seen evidence that over the period covered by the Child Practice Review a number of concerns were reported to LA1 C&FS regarding Foden's behaviour and conduct. These concerns related to his persistent 1:1 contact and interaction with vulnerable female pupils and were received from professionals across a number of agencies including Ysgol Friars, School 2, LA2 social workers, LA3 social workers, LA1 social workers, the SARC, NSPCC, Health Care Agency, members of SMT, hostel manager, a foster carer via their social worker, a pupil and the families/carers of vulnerable pupils. Some of the referrals were about the same named female pupils whilst the referrals relating to restraint were exclusively about male pupils.

The procedures for managing Safeguarding Allegations/Concerns about Practitioners and Those in Positions of Trust are currently set out in Section 5 of the *Welsh Safeguarding Procedures*⁵ and were previously managed under *Part 4 of the All-Wales Child Protection Procedures 2008*.

⁵ <https://www.safeguarding.wales/en/>

Where a concern or allegation about an adult working with children is disclosed or reported the case is usually managed and led by the Local Authority in which the adult is employed. The Section 5 Guidance clearly states that:

'Every Local Authority has a duty to manage allegations and concerns about those whose work with children, either in a paid or voluntary capacity, and who brings them into contact (directly or indirectly) with children or adults at risk, and must have a designated officer who is an identified senior manager responsible and accountable for the management and monitoring of allegations/concerns against practitioners and those in positions of trust. Each Local Authority is mandated to have a social work professional dedicated to this role - known as the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).'

The Section 5 guidance continues with the explanation of the application of the procedures noting that they do not apply only where significant harm is suspected but also cover consideration of '**suitability**' to work with children.

The procedures set this out as below, giving examples of behaviour which might be considered under that heading;

*'Managing cases under these procedures applies to a wider range of allegations than those in which there is reasonable cause to believe a child or adult at risk is suffering, or is likely to suffer harm. It also applies to concerns that might indicate that a person is **unsuitable to continue to work with children or adults at risk in their present position or in any capacity** [reviewer's emphasis]. It should be used in all cases in which it is alleged that a person who works with children or adults at risk has:*

- *Behaved in a way that has harmed or may have harmed a child or adult at risk*
- *May have committed a criminal offence against a child or adult at risk or that has a direct impact on the child or adult at risk*
- *Behaved towards a child, children or adults at risk in a way that indicates they are unsuitable to work with both children and adults'*

The Guidance then continues, giving examples of behaviours which might be considered concerning noting that:

*'It can be difficult to determine what may fall into the category of '**unsuitable to work with children or adults at risk**'. The employer should consider whether the subject of the allegation or concern has:*

- *Been the subject of criminal procedures that indicate a risk of harm to a child or adult at risk*
- *Caused harm or possible harm to a child or adult at risk and there is a risk in the working, volunteering, or caring environment*
- *Contravened or continued to contravene their agency's Safeguarding Policy and Procedures*
- ***Failed to understand or comply with the need for clear personal and professional boundaries in the workplace** [Reviewers emphasis]*

- *Behaved in a way in their personal life which could put children and adults at risk of harm*
- *Behaved in a way that undermined the trust placed in them by virtue of their position*
- *Children who are subject to Child Protection Procedures*
- *Has caring responsibilities for an adult who is subject to Adult Protection Procedures*

The Guidance further states:

'that In cases where there is an identifiable child, young person or adult at risk who may be raising the concern or has been subjected to possible abuse then a proportionate assessment will be carried out by social services in accordance with the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014⁶.'

The Guidance notes specifically that:

*'In cases where there is an identifiable child or adult at risk who has been subject to abuse or neglect, the Wales Safeguarding Procedures will be implemented and followed alongside the process outlined in these procedures. **If there is no identifiable child or adult at risk and the professional meets the criteria identified above, then these procedures will still be invoked.**'*
 [Reviewers emphasis]

In every case where there are concerns or allegations about an adult working with child/ children or in a position of trust, consideration must be given to the level of risk the child may be facing. Therefore, legal duty would be to undertake a s.47 investigation in order to assess risk and give the child/children a voice where the LA has reasonable cause to suspect a child is at risk of significant harm. The s.47 investigation should be coordinated with the Part 5 Professional Strategy Meetings, to ensure that all relevant information is shared in the appropriate forum. Where issues are cross-border, the home authority of the child must always be invited to contribute to the Professional Strategy Meetings and where a child is subject to a s.47 investigation this would be carried out by the child's Home Authority.

In this complex case Foden was head of a school whose catchment area is primarily Bangor and its environs and wider areas of the County. However, Ysgol Friars also had pupils on roll whose homes were in one of the neighbouring counties in North Wales, and some of those pupils became victims/survivors of Foden's abuse. The neighbouring counties have separate safeguarding arrangements that sit within their children's Social Care and Education Departments. Whilst LA1 is by default the prime Local Authority under consideration, for the purposes of this Review, the neighbouring counties are designated as Local Authority 2 (LA2) and Local Authority 3 (LA3).

A further complicating factor was that each of the children impacted had, in addition, engaged to a greater or lesser degree with a range of local and regional services such as Health Care agencies, health services (all tiers), the SARC, NWP, education welfare, social work, family support teams and Child Looked After (CLA) services (this

⁶ All-Wales Child Protection Procedures 2008

is not an exhaustive list) working to different geographical borders. This is not an unusual situation for many schools, but it does mean that cross-border communications must be clear and effective and demonstrates that the involvement of all agencies engaging with a child, children and families where there is a risk of harm is of vital importance to safeguarding children. Cross-border differences in the application of safeguarding thresholds and information sharing protocols cannot stand in the way of keeping children safe. The North Wales Protocol for the Resolution of Professional Dispute Policy was not activated in this case where such differences had arisen.

The Section 5 Guidance is clear about the procedures the local authority safeguarding team must use following notification of a concern or allegation about an adult working with children in their area, and also clearly sets out who (in terms of agency representation and individuals) should be involved in discussions and meetings, and at which point they should be notified of the concern.

There are specific and clear processes to follow where concerns or allegations are raised about a Headteacher. Where a Headteacher is the subject of concern, the Section 5 Guidance and *Keeping Learners Safe Guidance, 2022*⁷ is clear on the respective roles and involvement of the Chair of Governors and Local Authority Designated Lead Officer for Safeguarding.

In LA1 it seems that there was either a lack of understanding of the Section 5 process or a failure to follow it. In particular there is no evidence of the Chair of Governors, as Foden's employer, or the Local Authority Designated Lead Officer for Safeguarding having been party to initial Strategy Discussions when concerns had been reported about Foden, nor were they invited to the Section 5 Professional Strategy Meetings which in some cases followed.

This was out of process and a missed opportunity

In the majority of cases where concerns were raised about Foden, the initial Strategy Discussions did not include representatives from the Local Authorities in which the children subject to the concerns resided. This meant that information about the children and any involvement they might have with other agencies was not taken into consideration when assessing risk and vulnerability. The Review has not seen any clear recording of Strategy Discussions (or the decisions made at these meetings), and most did not progress to a Professional Strategy Meeting where information could have been appropriately shared. This was often due to decisions being made that the concerns did not meet the criminal threshold or the threshold for a s.47 investigation to be instigated. The Review has seen little evidence of '*suitability to work with children*' criteria being considered.

This was a missed opportunity

⁷ <https://www.gov.wales/keeping-learners-safe>

Almost all concerns raised about Foden were third-party and many of them related to agency professionals' discomfort and disquiet about Foden's conduct, as observed in his interaction with female pupils, many of whom were known by the agencies to have specific vulnerabilities that would put them at risk. The lack of a direct disclosure from a child, or a witness account of 'evidence' of abusive behaviour, coupled with a lack of consideration of the suitability criteria set out above meant that issues were to be referred back to LA1 Head of Education 1 to be managed as a concern about professional boundaries rather than an issue of safeguarding. In many cases LA1 Head of Education 1 had not personally attended these meetings and, in the absence of clear records had relied on LA1 Senior Manager Ed2 (later Head of Education 2) to report back, or on LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO relaying a message to LA1 Head of Education 1 by phone after the event.

LA1 C&FS's inadequate record keeping in regard to Section 5 Strategy Discussions is a recurring theme identified by the Review and represents missed opportunities to identify emerging patterns of Foden's behaviour and conduct.

The conclusion of matters at the point of Strategy Discussion, often attended by NWP and Education officials but not the school, rather than progressing to a Section 5 (or previously Part 4) Professional Strategy Meeting, demonstrated a lack of understanding in LA1 C&FS among senior staff of professional standards required of teaching staff and those working in education as set out not only in *Keeping Learners Safe 2022* but also by the EWC with whom teaching staff in Wales must register. Thus, concerns were repeatedly referred to as 'overstepping boundaries' or 'professional matters' rather than considering the behaviours through a safeguarding lens, or as potentially abuse of Position of Trust. This meant discussions around Foden's suitability to work with children were precluded at an early stage.

In the cases of Child A, Child C and Child F there was sufficient information shared in referrals to amount to breaches of professional practice. In each of these cases, questions were repeatedly asked by senior officers in LA1 C&FS whether Foden had been specifically advised not to act in a certain manner and, if he had not, whether he would **know** that he should not behave in certain ways, for example being alone with a child, hugging a child, or giving them a lift in his car. In the case of Child G, similar questions were asked about whether it was acceptable for a teacher to email pupils on their private email address late at night, and although it was made clear by LA1 Senior Manager Ed2 (later LA1 Head of Education 2) at a Section 5 Professional Strategy Meeting that it was not, the meeting still concluded that whilst the concerns were substantiated Child G was not at risk of harm.

This was a missed opportunity, and no rationale was given for this

Had LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO and their team familiarised themselves with the EWC Code of Professional Standards and Practice they would have been aware that:

'it is the personal and professional responsibility of Registrants to:

- *recognise their personal responsibility as a role model and public figure, to uphold public trust and confidence in the education profession, both in and out of the workplace*

And to conduct relationships with learners and young people professionally by:

- *communicating with learners and young people respectfully, in a way which is appropriate for them*
- *using all forms of communication appropriately and responsibly, particularly social media*
- *ensuring any physical contact is necessary, reasonable, and proportionate*
- *contributing to the creation of a fair and inclusive learning environment by addressing discrimination, stereotyping, and bullying*
- *maintaining professional boundaries'*

In cases where concerns raised by or about the victims/survivors were deemed not to meet the threshold for a Professional Strategy Meeting, the '*voice of the child*' was not heard- no professional spoke with the children involved even when there were repeated concerns reported about the same named children, for example in the cases of Child A and Child F. The Review has not seen evidence that speaking to children was considered, and the decision not to regard matters as worthy of further investigation was made on the basis that in many cases the children who were the subjects of the concern had not directly disclosed or alleged abuse themselves. Weight was not given to the opinion and observations of experienced professionals who had witnessed concerning behaviours.

This was a missed opportunity

In April 2019 significant concerns were reported to LA1 Head of Education 1 by SMT 1. In response an *ad hoc* meeting was convened comprising the Director LA1 C&FS, LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO, LA1 Head of Education 1 and their legal advisor. There is no formal record of that meeting although contemporaneous notes made in that meeting by two attendees were shared with the Review.

At this meeting it was relayed that Core SMT 1 had framed the concerns raised as Foden putting himself at risk of false allegations by repeatedly meeting vulnerable female pupils alone in his room. This framing was accepted at the meeting without question by LA1 C&FS senior officers – as it had been by LA1 C&FS LADO since concerns were first raised in 2018. This reinforced the narrative that Foden was putting himself at risk, a theme which the CPR team noted had emerged first in the response to the concerns raised in 2018 and continued throughout the period of the Review.

Even though the pupils named by Core SMT 1 were known to at least some of those present at the meeting to have been the subject of previous referrals by other agencies regarding Foden's interactions with them, no one thought to consider that it

could be the vulnerable female pupils themselves who may be at risk from Foden. No one joined the dots or made the connection.

This was a missed opportunity

The outcome of this meeting, in terms of allocated actions has been disputed. Whilst there are also references to subsequent '*discussion on the stairs*' and '*shots across the bow*' conversations with Foden these cannot be evidenced. There was no formal Section 5 Professional Strategy meeting held in response to Core SMT 1's concerns, as LA1 SMT 1 was not requested to make a referral despite having shared his serious concerns, and neither did he take it upon himself to do so.

It was known in the school that Foden had frequent meetings with vulnerable female pupils behind closed doors in his office, with blinds closed, and lights off. Pupils and staff recognised that Foden had favourites, that he referred to these female pupils as his '*waifs and strays*', that they (the female pupils) were perceived by other pupils and staff to be treated differently and that they '*could get away with anything*'. Some of these female pupils had already been identified by Foden to his colleagues as being likely to make false allegations, thus actively undermining their credibility.

Professionals reporting concerns frequently experienced '*push back*' re the quality and format of their referral. Where a professional had observed behaviours which caused them to be concerned or uncomfortable they were dismissed as this being '*just a feeling*' and there being no *evidence* of abuse. The criminal threshold not being met was often used to determine whether a matter was taken forward and there was little evidence of use of the '*Suitability Criteria*' set out both in the *NWSCB 2020 Guidance* protocol and Section 5 Procedures. The fact that a child, children (or parent) had not made a specific or direct complaint was used to close down any further inquiry. Very few cases included any attempt to discuss the concerns with the child or children who were the subject of the concern.

Where, as was the case for Child G and Child F, children were spoken to, both said that they had been hugged and that this had made them feel uncomfortable. In Child G's case the '*hug*' was described as lasting 10 minutes where her arms were '*down beside her*'. Child F is recorded as saying that she was uncomfortable and had not given permission for the '*hug*'. The '*hug*' described by Child F was subsequently deemed by a professional to have been an '*appropriate hug*' when demonstrated, at their request, by the child.

In spite of the children's discomfort, neither of these incidents, when included alongside other concerns in referrals from more than one agency triggered a discussion around potential harm and the suitability of a senior professional behaving in this way. To have this type of contact with a child breaches the professional standards required of education staff. That aside, a professional adult giving a child a '***hug which the child subsequently discloses to have been unwanted and uncomfortable***' can under no circumstances be regarded as acceptable or appropriate, and should have triggered further intervention.

In addition to the way in which management of allegations was handled within LA1 C&FS there was disagreement between LA1 C&FS and other agencies working with vulnerable children. Amongst the three local authorities there were also differences of opinion about the threshold at which Section 5 Procedures should be invoked. Referrals made to LA1 C&FS were challenged based on their format, content and intent. These challenges were often carried out via extended email exchanges where a short phone call could have clarified the matter. The Review was told at Learning Events that this became a deterrent to making further referrals. The consequence was that action in response to referrals was delayed and children were left at risk of harm from Foden.

This was a missed opportunity

One such example of cross-border disagreement was that the interpretation of the threshold for holding a Section 5 Professional Strategy Meeting differed between LA1 where Foden was employed and LA2 where a female pupil who was the subject of concern was resident. This was the case for Child A where in 2019 an LA2 Social Worker reported their concerns about Foden to their manager, a concern also held by and shared with Child A's mother, about the nature of the relationship between Child A and Foden. The record related to a visit made to Child A at Ysgol Friars and where Foden was present.

The LA2 Social Worker recorded in their notes:

'It was apparent to me from the meeting that [Child A] was very trusting of [Foden] she appeared over reliant on him. [Foden] also appeared to be going that extra mile in supporting [Child A] as they both stated that Foden had been taking [Child A] to attend appointments and these were appointments that both mum and dad were unaware of.'

'I felt on a few occasions whilst in the meeting that the situation appeared too informal and where both [Child A] and [Foden] appeared overfamiliar with each other.'

The LA2 social worker then followed up with a home visit to the mother the next day in order to discuss a 'sensitive issue'. The worker recorded that:

'Whilst at the home visit Mum has stated that she feels uncomfortable with the situation of the Headmaster [Foden] spending too much time with [Child A]. Mum stated that from the initial multi agency meeting held in regard to [Child A], it was already decided without her agreement / or consent that the [Foden] and DDSP would support her daughter to attend appointments.'

'Mum stated that there have been 2 occasions where [Foden] has not returned [Child A] home until gone 9.30pm as they had apparently been at a cake-making evening or open evening.' Mum 'feels uncomfortable at times as [Foden] is overly kind and [Child A] helpful and this is how [previous perpetrator] was with the children'. Mum stated that she did not want to say anything out of turn or suggest anything other than support, however, [Child A]

spends most of her time with the [Foden], either at school or after school hours.'

'Mum also stated that both [Child A] and [Foden] were almost too overfamiliar with each other, in regard to how they greet each other or making a joke out of their situation.'

The LA2 Social Worker recorded that Mum did not know how to address this matter and that with Mum's agreement she had agreed to take it up with her line manager.

The discussion with the line manager in LA2 led to the matter being shared by LA2 Children's Services with LA1 C&FS. There followed a lengthy debate (largely over email) between LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO and various officials about whether the threshold for a Professional Strategy Discussion had been met. LA1 C&FS was clear that the threshold had not been met, whilst LA2 stated clearly that if the matter had been raised regarding a professional in their area a meeting **would** have been held to discuss the concerns.

This was a missed opportunity

The matter was escalated in correspondence between LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO and LA2, with a request from the former that a meeting was held to test the Part 4 threshold, which it failed to meet, but a Section 3 Strategy Discussion was subsequently held where it was acknowledged that the behaviour was inappropriate and '*gives a very uncomfortable feeling*', especially in light of other similar historic reports, but did not warrant formal strategy discussion or consideration under part 4 AWCPP 2008. This suggests an unacceptable tolerance of discomfort around inappropriate behaviour. Ultimately the matter was discussed at Head of Service level across Education and Children's Services Departments in both authorities.

Despite this discussion LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO remained adamant that the matter did not meet the threshold for discussion under the AWCPP 2008 Part 4 procedures (although he did note that there had been boundary issues and that the case would probably meet the criteria under the new 2020 Section 5 directions that had not yet been invoked).

It was clear in the record of these discussions that LA1 C&FS were aware that Child A had referred her own concerns about Foden the previous year (2018), and that she had been named by Core SMT 1 only two months earlier as one of the female pupils Foden was known to be spending time alone with.

This was a missed opportunity

A second example of LA1 C&FS initial reluctance to convene a Section 5 Professional Strategy Discussion (or consider under AWCPP 2020) related to the case of Child F. A referral was made by her social worker in July 2023 but was subject to repeated

requests for clarification. The push back from LA1 C&FS about the case led to delay, allowing it to drift over the school summer holiday. The matter was still in dispute nine weeks later at the start of the Autumn term and was not resolved until after Child D had disclosed sexual abuse by Foden on 6 September. The child about whom the threshold for concerns around interactions with Foden had been raised and disputed was subsequently recognised as Child F. This case is discussed in more detail under Theme 3: Inter-agency working.

This was a missed opportunity

The handling of each of these cases by LA1 C&FS showed little insight into the *modus operandi* of sex offenders, or the grooming of victims or of how sophisticated perpetrators will groom adults both in the organisation in which they operate and the community in which they work. Foden had normalised his behaviours even in the eyes of professionals. The content of the July 2023 referral re Child F was almost a textbook case-study of methods employed by perpetrators when grooming a child. The delays described above and the resistance to holding a Section 5 Professional Strategy Meeting left Child F vulnerable.

This was a missed opportunity

In terms of referrals under Part 5 relating to inappropriate physical restraint and intervention (with young male pupils) there is much debate about what level of intervention is appropriate and the techniques and methods which could reasonably be applied. Video footage of some of these interventions was available and deemed by NWP in one incident to be disproportionate, meriting suspension whilst the matter was under investigation. In practice, in spite of this concern being lodged at the same time as another restraint allegation against a young male pupil being considered and Section 5 investigation re a female pupil Child G, there is no evidence of these parallel matters being cross-referenced or linked with previous similar concerns.

This was a missed opportunity

Foden was required by the Chair of Governors to work from home for a period. This was despite the decision made by senior officers LA1 Director C&FS, LA1 Head of Education 1, LA1 Head C&FS, LA1 Former Corp Dir, LA1 Legal that it should be recommended to the Chair of Governors that he suspend Foden.

On 13 October 2021 Child G made a disclosure regarding Foden to staff at School 2. Child G directly disclosed that interaction with Foden made her feel uncomfortable and afraid of coming to school.

On 15 October 2021 two referrals were sent to LA1 C&FS Services in relation to Foden's interactions with Child G.

School 2 made a referral to LA1 C&FS following Child G's disclosure that because of Foden, she felt scared and uncomfortable coming to school, that her friends had shown her articles on Social Media about Foden and encouraged her to see that what Foden was doing to her was '*incorrect*'.

Child G disclosed that on 12 October 2021 Foden had asked to see her in his office and when she refused Foden had collected her from her first lesson and had taken her to his office himself. Child G shared that Foden had waited outside the classroom for 5-10 minutes for her to calm down as she had been distraught. School 2 submitted further information that a teaching assistant had also shared that she had overheard another pupil say that Child G '*will be complaining about Foden because he has touched her leg*'. Child G had also disclosed that Foden emailed her late at night, once as late as 00:45. Child G observed that Foden was helping [her] but was doing it in the wrong way.

On 15 October 2021 a Health Care agency made a separate but similar referral to LA1 C&FS in which it was reported that Child G had disclosed to a Health Care professional that day that Foden was making her feel very uncomfortable as he was asking to see her frequently in his office in school in order to check her arms for signs of self-harm.

Child G also shared that Foden frequently emailed her after school hours '*asking if she is ok and if she did not reply he will continue to message, recently she stated he emailed her at 00:45 asking her to come and see him in his office in the morning.*'

Child G disclosed to her health care practitioner that she was fearful of being excluded. She also informed them that she had spoken to Deputy Head DSP School 2, who had downloaded some of the emails from her phone and had also made a referral.

On 19 October 2021 the task of chairing a Section 5 Strategy Discussion was delegated to LA1 Team Leader C&FS at which it was agreed that a s.47 investigation would be carried out in regard to Child G and that confirmation of the emails sent by Foden would be sought. It was noted that there was no evidence of an offence having been committed but that there were boundary issues and that in terms of a Section 5 Professionals Strategy Meeting it was unclear whether there was abuse of a child.

The s.47 investigation commenced on 19 October 2021. During the investigation Child G shared that Foden frightened her, and that she had asked the Deputy Head DSP School 2 to inform Foden that she did not want to see him, and Deputy Head DSP School 2's response was that they '*couldn't do that because he is [their] boss*'. (this is a quote, paraphrased by LA1 in their chronology).

When asked about the hug mentioned in the referral from School 2, Child G shared that Foden had asked her to go to see him in his office. At first, she had refused then agreed. She disclosed that Foden had given her a hug and described that they were sat side by side, Foden had both his arms around her, and Child G's arms were down beside her. Child G had explained that Foden gave her the creeps. Child G said the hug lasted around 5-10 minutes.

Child G was advised that the hug and timing of the emails were inappropriate and unprofessional and to speak to her grandmother that evening. It was recorded that

'the outcome of s.47 is that concerns are substantiated, but the child is not judged to be at continuing risk of significant harm'.

The s.47 investigation concluded 19 Oct 2021. No one asked to see Foden's emails to verify Child G's account of events, nor indeed to seek further context or clarification of the exchanges.

On 3 November 2021 a Section 5 Professional Strategy Discussion was convened following the s.47 investigation.

It was reported in this Section 5 Professional Strategy Discussion that in the s.47 investigation, Child G had told social workers that she had conducted an internet search on Foden which had made her even more uncomfortable. She said that she was not happy about the things she had heard about him.

In relation to the prolonged hugging, Child G said that she was upset and had been crying. Foden had asked her to go into his room. He gave her a hug as she was upset but she felt that the hug went on for 10 minutes and had made her feel very uncomfortable.

The meeting Chair- LA1 Team Leader C&FS- inquired of the meeting whether it was appropriate for Foden to be sending e-mails outside of school hours, stating that they did not know whether this was acceptable conduct, and that LA1 Ed would be asked for their view.

LA1 Senior Manager Ed2 (Later Head of Education 2) informed the meeting that [in regard to Foden sending emails to Child G]

'it is inappropriate. Headteachers should not be conversing with pupils especially vulnerable ones outside of school hours. As the e-mails sent were from his school e-mail address they will be in a cloud and cannot be deleted. His actions were definitely inappropriate and not normal practice for a headteacher, the timing of it is also an issue he had only been at the school a month. The Education Department are concerned about the issues raised but in terms of the discussion here threshold is not met but some issues need addressing'.

LA1 Senior Manager Ed2 reiterated that '*it's a big no no to email.*'

It was noted in the meeting that professionals had only seen emails from Child G's phone but NWP stated that that:

'if the two are corresponding outside of school hours not sure how far we can take it, he's responding to her message he's not the one that's initiated the conversation, and if it's not going to go any further there's no need to gain access to the e-mails'.

Even though NWP recognised that '*if he was initiating the conversation then it would be a different story*' the decision was made not to take the inquiry further and Foden's emails were not reviewed.

The decision not to review Foden's email correspondence was a missed opportunity

The Reviewers have had access to some of Foden's email exchanges with Child G, and it was clear that Foden contacted Child G frequently over a considerable period of time, sometimes at night, and that sometimes he initiated the contact.

It was noted in the Section 5 meeting that Foden was new to School 2 and may not have been advised not to respond to Child G who had been known to email other staff. In fact, Foden had singled-out Child G, identifying her as vulnerable and had asked safeguarding staff about her. Foden was told that staff were finding it difficult to manage Child G's interactions with professionals and Foden had immediately offered to step in. Had DSP School 2 been invited to the Section 5 Professional Meeting, or had LA1 Ed engaged with School 2 on the matter prior to this meeting, this could have been made clear.

This was a missed opportunity

The outcome of the Section 5 Professional Strategy Discussion was that concerning issues had been raised '*but in terms of the discussion here, threshold had not been met but some issues need addressing.*' It was agreed that matters would need to be addressed by Education with the school. It is not clear if any action was taken, or how and who in the school was to be informed of this, though LA1 Senior Manager Ed2, later Head of Education 2 was in attendance. There was no clear record kept of the decision-making process or outcome which likely emboldened Foden going forward.

This was a missed opportunity

In the Chronology LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO reports:

'during the discussion some matters of professional practice were discussed. These involved the pastoral and support role and whether he [Foden] should be in a 1:1 situation with a vulnerable child, the question of touch and embracing a child and the messages outside school hours. A representative of the Education Service was intending to raise these issues with Foden'.

There is no record of any subsequent action having been taken or of who might have spoken to Foden and when.

This was a missed opportunity

14 January 2022 School 2 contacted LA1 Ed3 seeking advice on the outcome of the school's earlier referral relating to Child G, dated 15 October 2021. School 2 was concerned Foden had again been in contact with her requesting to see her only a week into the new term.

LA1 Ed3 subsequently contacted LA1 C&FS requesting feedback following School 2's earlier referral on Child G and was told by LA1 Team Leader C&FS that the matter had concluded and was closed to LA1 C&FS (see below for further feedback). This is consistent with an email seen by the Review (dated 10 November 2021) addressed to Chair of Governors, School 1 (see footnote p. 25) which stated as part of the Section 5 Strategy Discussion that

'...no crime or any child protection matters. The case is closed and there are no further actions necessary.' 'Matters of professional practice were discussed'

and that

'a representative of the Education Service was intending to raise these issues with Mr Foden'.

The Review has seen evidence that Foden received a letter dated 15 November 2021 from LA1 C&FS Senior Manager 2 (LADO)

'as per action of Section 5 Strategy Discussion (03/11/2021) regarding the outcome of an investigation into the allegations made against [him] recently'.

In response, Foden had provided written assurances by email on 15 November 2021 that he

'will not be replying to emails or meeting [Child G] after this allegation'.

That this had not been communicated to the school was a missed opportunity

Had the school been made aware of this outcome, they would have been in a position to respond very differently when told by Child G in January 2022 that Foden had contacted her, requesting to see her.

On 14 January, LA1 Ed3 sought advice from LA1 C&FS, specifically asking whether there was anything to prevent Foden from speaking with Child G. Following this request for information, LA1 Ed3 stated in an email sent to LA1 Head of Education 1 (*for information*), that she had been informed by LA1 Team Leader C&FS, based on Section 5 Professional Strategy Discussion minutes, that

'the Head of Year should be informed about the meeting and that Child G is happy to meet with Foden' ('fod angen i Pennaeth blwyddyn Child G wybod am y cyfarfod a fod Child G yn hapus i gyfarfod a Mr Foden').

The poor grammar in this email may have clouded its intended meaning, and there was nothing in the Section 5 Professional Strategy Discussion notes corresponding to the head of year needing to be informed. It is unclear who originally made this point, and based on what information.

This ambiguity notwithstanding, it would appear that Foden's response to LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO, namely that he *'will not be replying to emails or meeting [Child G]'* was not known by LA1 Team Leader C&FS and therefore was not conveyed to School 2.

This was a missed opportunity

The Review has seen no evidence that these two key pieces of information had been shared with the school safeguarding staff following the November 2021 investigation. Deputy Head DSP School 2 stated, during an interview with Reviewers, that they had not been aware of this information at the time and stated that Child G had **not** been happy to meet Foden. Child G's unease at having been asked to meet with Foden was the reason School 2 had sought advice from LA1 Ed3. School 2 was also not aware that Foden had been spoken to and had stated that he would refrain from seeing or contacting Child G again.

On 10 January 2022, four days prior to the above correspondence, emails were exchanged between LA1 Head of Education 1 and Foden concerning whether or not School 2 should make a new referral about Child G. The Review has seen emails that demonstrate that LA1 Ed3 was firmly of the opinion that a referral **should** be made and that Foden should **not** be told about this referral. These emails demonstrate that Foden **was** informed. There is evidence that LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO and School 2 Deputy Head were named as having been involved in the discussion, but it appears that no further records exist, and the Reviewers have not been able to ascertain the nature of the concern, the content of the discussion or the circumstances which gave rise to discussion. LA1 C&FS have stated that no referral was made.

This was a missed opportunity

The negative response received to the submission of concerns about Foden undoubtedly acted as a deterrent to further reporting. This is evidenced in communication between Core SMT 1 and Core SMT 3 in April /May 2020 which refers back to the report made by Core SMT 1 in April 2019, and in email exchanges sent in 2023 between all three members of Core SMT at Ysgol Friars (see key events) and seen by the Review where Core SMT 1 and 3 requested that the DSP 2 makes a referral and he refused to do so.

Similarly, in other cases relating to victims/survivors when front-line practitioners made referrals to LA1 C&FS, they were required to revert to their senior managers for further support. In some cases, there is evidence that the application of thresholds became a focus of extended debate between LA1 C&FS and senior leaders in LA2 and LA3, rather than directing action to keep children safe. This is explored under Theme 3 Inter-agency Working.

The Reviewers saw no evidence of formal escalation through The North Wales Protocol for the Resolution of Professional Dispute Policy processes being followed to resolve these disputes, but rather prolonged email exchanges between professionals in neighbouring Local Authorities.

It is important that professionals raising concerns about an adult working with children can do so with confidence that they will be heard. For the most part the children who were the subject of a professional's concern were not spoken to, and where they were, their opinions and experiences were not taken into consideration or not given sufficient weight to impact on outcomes.

These were missed opportunities and children remained at risk

Theme 3: Inter-Agency Working

The formal arrangements for inter-agency working to safeguard children and adults at risk are set out in the *Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act, 2014*⁸ and accompanying Guidance. *Working Together to Safeguard People: Code of Safeguarding Practice For individuals, groups and organisations offering activities or services to children and adults in Wales January 2022*⁹.

The Welsh Government expects all individuals, groups and organisations offering activities or services to children and adults in Wales to follow the advice provided in this Code of Safeguarding Practice.

Where there is a concern about an adult working with children, professionals in all agencies have a responsibility to work cooperatively and to act without delay to safeguard the child and other children with whom that adult might come into contact. Numerous safeguarding reviews have identified that effective inter-agency working practice is fundamental to keeping children safe. There should be clear written protocols for managing concerns and information sharing that are effective and proportionate. Professionals need to be confident in their own work and ability to assess risk, but also to recognise the roles, systems and restrictions under which professionals in other agencies work. Whilst there is an employer's duty of care to the adult, the safety of the child takes precedence. All agencies must ensure that their staff are competent, well trained and able to escalate both intra- and inter-agency risks expediently.

⁸ *Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act, 2014*

⁹ <https://www.gov.wales/working-together-safeguard-people-code-safeguarding-practice>

Trust and understanding are vital elements of all partnership working and a focus on the well-being of the child/children should override personal and professional differences.

Professionals from all agencies need to be mindful that other agencies may operate under different structures, that protocols for sharing concerns may differ and that the terminology commonly used by one agency may not be the same across all agencies. It is therefore essential that multi-agency training takes account of this. Equally, thresholds for intervention may differ between agencies and moreover between counties and regions. Barriers to inter-agency working were demonstrated to this Review in the IMR analysis provided by LA1 C&FS where it is noted that '*LA1 Children Services remain unclear about the allocation of responsibilities between the LEA and Board of Governors in such areas*'.

Evidence submitted to this Review has demonstrated some considerable barriers to effective inter-agency working across the three Local Authorities and agencies involved in this case. This is covered in some detail in Theme 2 above in relation to the management of allegations but also applies to other aspects of inter-agency working.

The format and content of referrals to LA1 C&FS are a case in point (although a common format is also used by LA2 and 3). It is expected that all safeguarding and child protection referrals be made to a single point of contact for triage, using a standard referral form. The referral form LA1 C&FS use is common across the region and is designed to capture details of concerns about children and families. The Review is concerned that if referrals and enquires are made over the phone, they will not be actioned until the form is completed to the satisfaction of LA1 C&FS.

Where a concern or allegation is made against an adult working with children, LA1 C&FS require the same form to be completed, notwithstanding that there may be little information known about the child and family (particularly when that child is resident in another county) and that the concern relates to the behaviour of an adult. There is no scope on the form to properly address concerns about the adult against whom the allegation is being made, making the form impractical to use in the situation. Use of the form is applied rigidly, as experienced first-hand by the CPR Review team, for example even when DDSP telephoned to report the disclosure by Child D on 6 September 2023, where an emergency response should have been the first course of action, LA1 C&FS required the information to be submitted. It is also of note that the form is not easy to find online in a format that can be easily edited and does not guide the referrer in terms of content.

Professionals from a number of agencies contributing to this Review commented on the difficulty of having a referral about an adult working with children accepted by LA1 C&FS, many reporting that the form was returned to them requesting further clarification and querying their use of terminology or disputing application of thresholds. In some cases, this resulted in the form having to be revised and resubmitted several times, in turn causing delay in acting on the content. In many cases a phone call between professionals could have clarified matters much more swiftly and then been followed up in writing.

It was reported by officers in LA1 Ed that this had resulted in schools, under the guidance of senior education safeguarding officers, having to take a strategic approach to form filling in order to get a concern accepted by LA1 C&FS for action. This was inevitably a source of frustration to the referrer, and obvious risk to the child or children, as having to consult on the way in which to successfully complete a referral form would invariably cause delay in making the referral itself.

In terms of application of thresholds there was a reluctance to properly consider concerns raised by experienced professionals in other agencies where it was deemed there was a lack of concrete evidence, even in cases where multiple referrals were received almost simultaneously, independently of each other by informed professionals who referenced the same concern. In the case of Child A professionals from both the SARC and NSPCC had separately referred their concerns about the nature of observed interactions between Foden and Child A which indicated a power imbalance, over familiarity and overstepping boundaries. The NSPCC referrer reported to this Review that they '*could not understand*' how the senior official LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO, could have interpreted what they had written in the referral as they had done, there seeming to be a complete disconnect between the content and the response received. This caused the NSPCC worker to review the referral and discuss with their supervisor. The referral was reported by LA1 C&FS to the Review as having been '*retracted*' whereas in fact it had been deemed by LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO not to have met the threshold for a Section 5 Professional Strategy Meeting, and no further action was taken. NSPCC vehemently deny having retracted their referral.

Similarly, in July 2023 a social worker from a neighbouring authority submitted a report regarding Foden's interactions with Child F which contained a description of behaviours which clearly suggested that Child F was being groomed, and that Foden had hugged her in a way that made her feel uncomfortable. The referral was considered inadequate on the basis that further information was required in order to be able to proceed and that the referral was poorly presented.

In the ensuing discussion conducted largely via email LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO questions the referral, stating:

'I think you can understand that making a child protection referral about Foden is a very serious matter. It infers that he is doing something directly against the instructions and agreements in place with him, that he shouldn't. We really need to understand the evidence.' Whilst at the same time referring to '*This has not been the first instance in which it has been asked for Mr Foden to not to have any unsupervised time with Child F due to concerns around the professional relationship (It is unclear who has asked who not to do this, and when. Has Foden been asked not to do so? If so, has he agreed? Who told him and when? Is it part of a child's Education Plan that he doesn't do that? If he's not to do it, has he been told why?'*

This demonstrates a lack of inter-agency understanding of professional standards and processes as referred to under Theme 2: Managing Allegations. The matter was not deemed by LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO to meet the threshold for a Professional

Strategy Meeting under Section 5 although the other authority was clear that it met *their* threshold. The matter was not resolved for a further 9 weeks – in fact until after Child D had disclosed abuse at the school on 6 September 2023.

This was a missed opportunity

The way in which concerns about adults working with children were managed by LA1 demonstrates a clear disconnect between LA1 Ed and LA1 C&FS in terms of expectations of professional practice and a lack of respect for other agency's professional assessment of concerns and risks which do not meet the criminal threshold.

In the case of Child A and F there were disputes between the home authorities and LA1 regarding the threshold for holding a Section 5 Professional Strategy Meeting, with those authorities confirming that had the professional been working in their area the threshold would have been deemed to have been met and a meeting convened.

Lack of understanding of agency procedures also impeded effective and efficient handling of concerns in an emergency. When the disclosure from Child D was reported on 6 September 2023, it was not reported in line with school policy which clearly states that when a concern or allegation is raised about the head teacher the Chair of Governors and Education Safeguarding Officer should be informed. The Review has heard that neither the Chair of Governors nor his Deputy could be reached by DDSP until early afternoon, despite repeated attempts, and have seen no evidence of any attempt having been made by DDSP or LA1 Team Leader C&FS to contact the Education Safeguarding Officer, as would be expected if reporting procedures were followed, nor did the DDSP or LA1 C&FS immediately call NWP, although there was verbally stated evidence of the sexual abuse of a child by the Headteacher. Despite having been informed prior to NWP, the Review has seen no evidence that LA1 Senior Manager Ed2, Later Head of Education 2 informed the Education Safeguarding Officer, Chair of Governors, LA1 Head of Ed 1 or NWP.

The result of this was that Child D remained at risk, hidden on school premises whilst Foden, who had unsuccessfully tried to gain access to her, was able to delete evidence on his mobile phone and continued to have access to his other devices.

Theme 4: Restrictive Practices

The Review has been told that Foden had a reputation that dated back over decades for using physical force to restrain male pupils. Reviewers have seen evidence of four documented cases of restrictive practices having been used by Foden against young, male pupils between 2021 and 2022, across both schools, and also of incidents carried out by other male members of the Core SMT in Ysgol Friars. Three of these four cases were referred under Section 5 procedures and one was not. None of the referrals were made by the school. A clear, full record of complaints on the use of restrictive practices was not found in Ysgol Friars, as would have been expected by LA1 Ed.

Foden's use of restraint against young male pupils not only demonstrated an abuse of his authority and control but was likely to have been deliberate to set a climate of fear among pupils. Restraint incidents were conducted in plain sight, often with members of his SMT nearby, encouraged by him to film incidents on their personal mobile phones. Foden had told them that he was fully justified in his actions and stood firm on his right to act in this way, as outlined in Ysgol Friars policy and in his interpretation of various county and national policy and guidance documents (referenced in detail below). This same stance was used in his defence statement submitted 16 December 2021 for consideration at a Section 5 Professional Strategy Meeting. That his stance on this behaviour appears to have gone unchallenged is of great concern. It also paved the way for other male members of his Ysgol Friars SMT to adopt the same position and behaviour.

Welsh Government is clear that the focus of policy and practice should be on the reduction of restrictive practices. Welsh Government published a *Reducing Restrictive Practices Framework, 2021*¹⁰ that seeks to reduce the requirement to use restrictive practices, and states that where they are used, it is as a last resort to prevent harm to the individual or others and is informed by person-centred planning. This Framework replaced the *Framework for Restrictive Physical Intervention, Policy, and Practice, 2005*¹¹, which was based on the same core principles.

However, the 2021 Framework provides guidance and is non-statutory, setting out the Welsh Government's expectations for policy and practice. As such Estyn is expected to consider compliance with the approach set out in the Framework when they carry out inspections. Placing this reliance on Estyn presents a risk given that it is not uncommon for over 6 years to pass between school inspections. Estyn's last inspection of Ysgol Friars was in 2017, 8 years ago. The Framework also sets out that if there is any indication that restrictive practices are being used inappropriately this must be reported as a safeguarding concern. Against this approach, the question of whether the degree of force used was reasonable or amounts to criminal assault is less likely to require addressing if every preventative step is first put in place.

Where restrictive practices are used, as a last resort, they must fall within the framework and principles that support human rights (*Human Rights Framework for Restraint produced by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, EHRC, 2019*¹²). All acts of restrictive practice must be the least restrictive option available. In the cases considered in this Review, this does not appear to have been the case.

Statistically, children with additional learning needs are most at risk of abuse. Particular sensitivity should be given therefore in exercising the power to use force against children with special educational needs (SEN), emotional and behavioural problems, as is laid out in the Welsh Government's *Reducing Restrictive Practices Framework: children's rights impact assessment, 2021*¹³. Foden did not comply with

¹⁰ *Reducing Restrictive Practices Framework, 2021*

¹¹ *Framework for Restrictive Physical Intervention, Policy, and Practice, 2005*

¹² *Human Rights Framework for Restraint produced by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, EHRC, 2019*

¹³ <https://www.gov.wales/reducing-restrictive-practices-framework-childrens-rights-impact-assessment>.

this expectation in relation to Child 1, and did not apply provision, criterion or practice that was appropriate to the child's known condition.

National Guidance on restraints in force in the time period considered in this Review (*Safe and Effective Intervention – use of reasonable force and searching for weapons, 2013*¹⁴) also clearly sets out that teachers should use force as the last resort, and that pupils with additional needs should have a behaviour management plan where needed. That guidance sets out the role of the Education Authority in gathering information to identify trends and evaluate schools' attitudes towards the use of physical intervention.

LA1's own exemplar policy on Safe Intervention, published in 2018, reflects national guidance, and includes providing advice on reducing the need to use reasonable force and giving specific attention to pupils with additional learning needs (ALN). In terms of reporting on incidents, it is stated that a record of the incident should be made as soon as possible, (when the incident is still easy to recall) on the *Use of Reasonable Force-HS11* form, sending a copy to the Local Authority and keeping a copy safe at the school. This safeguarding policy places a duty on schools to contact the Designated Lead Officer for Safeguarding Children in Education immediately when a concern or allegation has been made against a member of staff. This was not done despite Ysgol Friars' policy containing this same information, albeit with outdated contact information. The school did not follow its own policy. Foden had persuaded his staff that the decision regarding whether the use of force had been unreasonable was his to make. The Review have no record of him ever having reached this decision, thus removing any obvious means by which the Local Authority could monitor the frequency and extent of force used in restraints by Ysgol Friars staff.

In this respect, Foden went to great lengths to undermine the principles set out in the 2022 national guidance and associated legislation by way of selective quoting, placing his own interpretation on ambiguities therein, and instructing his SMT- in emails seen by the Reviewers- that on handling such cases, the authority for making decisions about referrals on restraints by staff and what might constitute unreasonable force lay with him. He cast sufficient doubt on their own understanding of procedures gleaned through formal training provided to them by the Local Authority. In so doing, Foden increased his SMT's tolerance of this practice when seen, and also the associated risk of harm to pupils at Ysgol Friars.

On the use of unreasonable force, the school Child Protection Policy is consistent with national guidance in stating that an initial assessment- not an investigation- should be carried out to assess the circumstances but **only** after consulting with Social Services and the Local Authority. This should be done by the Headteacher in instances of allegations against their staff or by the Chair of Governors when it relates to a Headteacher. The Review has seen no evidence that the Chair of Governors was informed about any restraints, as they should have been, and no cases were reported to the Local Authority by either school staff or the Chair of Governors.

¹⁴ *Safe and Effective Intervention – use of reasonable force and searching for weapons, 2013*

School 2's Policy on Safe Intervention broadly follows LA1's exemplar policy, and there is mention of the use of HS11 forms in this context in one of their recorded restraint cases.

Today, the *Keeping Learners Safe Guidance, 2022* emphasises that when a concern relates to a member of staff, schools cannot make their own internal decisions in terms of whether this is a disciplinary matter or a child protection matter.

A clear organisational commitment to human rights with a reduction in the use of restrictive practices can only be properly implemented and maintained through a whole organisational approach. This was fundamentally lacking in Ysgol Friars. Those with concerns felt unable to raise their concern with DSP 2 since he was either the subject of their concern or had been a supportive bystander in incidents involving Foden's use of these methods against male pupils.

Staff must feel that they are able to use Whistleblowing processes to escalate concerns in instances of concern, including where it is perceived that the degree of force used in restraints is excessive, or the practice is used too frequently. The Review has heard from staff who did not feel able to Whistle blow, nor did they know how to go about whistleblowing about behaviours that caused them concern.

A summary of the four documented incidents is given in the key events timeline, listed by incident date.

Non-Referred cases:

Child M Ysgol Friars, 18 May 2021, early KS3 pupil.

The incident in focus involved a male pupil being reprimanded for phone use and swearing. The parent's subsequent complaint reported three adult males (Foden, Core SMT 1 and DSP 2) using restrictive practices against Child M and using their phones to film these altercations, allegedly in an attempt to elicit a reaction. The Review hears that this was a practice which was commonly used by SMT members and was used to trigger behaviour in a pupil that would result in the ramping up of negative behaviour points to the point of reaching a permanent exclusion threshold.

In this instance, the most extreme methods of restraint were used by Foden who Child M had sought out for protection from Core SMT 1 and DSP 2. Foden allegedly held him in a chokehold during a struggle, and later across his chest, reportedly restricting his breathing, despite Child M being in an already distressed state and this going counter to the school's own policy¹⁵. An initial informal complaint by Child M's parent was ignored. The complaint was then formalised in a letter sent by the parents to the Chair of Governors. It was claimed that Foden had admitted that although the method used had restricted the child's breathing, in a letter sent by Foden to Child M's parent, he quoted NWP as having '*observed that [his] technique was perfect*', a claim since refuted by NWP.

¹⁵ *Pupil Conduct Policy, Section 6: Physical Restraint*

The event was captured on CCTV, and records show that the restraint was not considered by NWP to have amounted to criminal assault meaning that neither Core SMT 1 nor Foden were formally logged as suspects on NWP systems. There is an argument that the incident should still have been considered for a CID16 (see appendix 1) or for an assessment of '*suitability to work with children*' under Section 5 Procedures. None of these options were taken, and therefore there would be no record of the incident held on either NWP or LA1 C&FS records.

Requests by the parent to view this footage and see the associated *HS11 Use of Reasonable Force* form were ignored by Foden. There were reported inconsistencies in evidence given by the school to the parent.

There is no record of Child M having been checked for injury following these restraints, as is advised in national guidance which states an expectation that the child should be checked, both immediately and also in the longer-term, with support also being offered to the child. There is no such expectation outlined in Ysgol Friars' policy nor indication that this was offered or provided.

The school stated that they had followed their own policies in the handling of both the incident and complaint. The school policy had not been followed and in any case the school's policies deviate from national and regional guidance, detailed above.

The parent did not feel that the nature of her complaint had been understood i.e. that the restraint was not proportionate to the offence and had been the first rather than last resort used. In her persistence to be heard, she was ultimately designated as a vexatious complainant and told that future complaints from her would not be accepted. This decision, in a letter sent to the parent by Foden, stated that he had the full support of Chair of Governors and Gov 2. The Reviewers however have seen no evidence of their involvement.

Referred Cases:

Child H School 2 1 February 2022 KS4 pupil.

Child H was displaying challenging behaviour with his peers. Email reference to an HS11 form indicates that restraint techniques were used during this incident. Foden contacted the parent to inform them of an incident and consequential suspension. The parent, concerned that Foden was becoming renowned for this behaviour across both schools, reported the matter to NWP, Gov 3, LA1 Head of Education 1 and LA1 C&FS. In light of the parent's anger and the level of interest generated across agencies and on social media in response to a video of the incident having been circulated, the LA1 Head of Education 1 and Gov 3 School 2 took the decision that the matter would be investigated by the school as there was a risk to reputation. They did so apparently before a referral was made to LA1 C&FS. It is stated in an email sent by LA1 Team Leader C&FS that safeguarding procedures did not appear to have been immediately followed. Following this the matter was considered under Child Protection Procedures triggering a s.47 and Section 5 discussion but did not meet the threshold to proceed further.

The primary focus of extensive discussions between LA1 Ed and LA1 C&FS appears to have been around management of processes rather than risks and did not consider that this was the fourth *documented* incident where Foden had used restraint against a child in as many months.

Child J School 2, 12 November 2021, KS4 pupil.

Again, this incident was filmed by staff. Restrictive practice methods had been used by Foden against Child J who was sitting in the wrong class, refusing to move. In considering the referral, the issue of proportionality does not appear to have been considered, LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO stating '*we understand [Foden] did this under the Reasonable Force Procedures*' giving little indication of scrutiny of that stance or of the overarching principles of these procedures. They added that '*the practices viewed in the footage are general within schools under such circumstances*'. The Reviewers argue that this is not in line with the principles of this policy, nor indeed should be accepted as being '*general within schools*'.

Concern was expressed by LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO around the practice of staff filming such incidents, but it was felt that it was for the Governing Body to satisfy themselves on the policies they have in place and how these are executed and that there was no need to review the reasonable force policy '*which exists within the Education Department systems that give authority to teachers under some circumstances to interfere in this way*'. This referral did not progress to Section 3 or Section 5.

Child I Ysgol Friars. 27 September 2021. A restraint was carried out on a slightly built, early KS3 pupil with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and an Independent Development Plan (IDP). The child had received mixed messages about an instruction in class and became distressed. Foden was called to the incident, despite there being other intermediary steps outlined in the school's Behaviour Policy and it not appearing to be a dangerous situation. Foden used what was argued to have been unreasonable methods of restraint against the boy, showing no regard for his SEN. Four members of the SMT and other staff witnessed the event and some also filmed the incident. The NWP School PLO who arrived after Foden had tipped the child to the floor, witnessed Foden kneeling over the boy's head, with '*his crotch in the child's face*', while pressing down on his chest. This is against school, regional and national policies on restraint.

No medical or physical checks of Child I were completed or advised following the incident and the parent's requests to the school for counselling were ignored, contrary to national guidance outlined above. The mother reported in late December 2021 that her formal request for information had still not been met by Education.

At the time of the incident, the school did not refer the matter to LA1 C&FS, the child was not checked for injuries and no safeguarding actions were taken. Over a month passed before the school Data Protection Officer, on reviewing CCTV footage that had been requested by the parent, made a referral which triggered a Part 3, s.47 and Section 5 processes. This delay was key in NWP consideration at the Section 5 Discussion and in Chair of Governor's later rationale for deciding not to suspend Foden.

Concluding the joint s.47 process, it was noted that there was no evidence of significant harm nor lasting effects on Child I but there remained significant concerns about Foden's behaviour and that of his staff. The restraint was not considered by NWP to have amounted to criminal assault, leaving concerns only on the threshold of position of trust to be discussed, alongside the associated question of '*suitability to work with children*'.

A Section 5 Professional Strategy Meeting followed on 11 January 2022- Key points: Foden presented a statement in his defence for use in the Strategy Meeting on the restraint of Child I. In it he selectively quotes *Section 93 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006*¹⁶, *Welsh Government guidance document 097/2013*¹⁷ and his own school policy as justification for his use of restrictive practice in this restraint case and quoted his SMT as being supportive of his actions.

Regarding the position of trust threshold, LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO, Chair of the Section 5 Strategy Meeting, reflected on Foden's statement, noting that in their opinion it was

'very difficult to argue that Foden's behaviour would make it inappropriate for him to work with children, as Foden had stated clearly that he had followed policy at the time of the incident'.

This demonstrates a wholly inadequate level of scrutiny of the skewed perspective presented by Foden on national guidance and policy, as presented in his own statement. Stating that the '*Reasonable Force Policy sits within Education*' and explaining ambiguously that it '*gives authority to teachers under some circumstances to interfere in this way*' suggests that LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO lacked an adequate grasp on the matter. There was disagreement among attendees on this point- made by LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO- especially in light of there being a simultaneous investigation relating to Foden using similar restraint methods on Child J, School 2, and a referral under Section 5 considering concerns about Child G, all of which would have been known about at the time by LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO and LA1 Team Leader C&FS. Not all attendees had viewed footage of the incident, and it could be argued were ill-equipped to express a view.

LA1 Team Leader C&FS raised questions about there having been no attempt to take a more measured approach to resolution prior to the use of force. NWP questioned the need for Foden to take the child down. A social worker saw the method as not appropriate or safe. Ed2 had expressed strong discontent at Foden's conduct, noting that the law was vague in terms of the definition of reasonable force and when it can be used. However, Ed2 noted that the county's exemplar policy should be reviewed considering the concerns that had been raised in this case. It was also noted that Ysgol Friars was acting outside LA1's policy on Safe Intervention in terms of reporting on the use of reasonable force in not submitting HS11 forms to the LEA. LA1's exemplar policy also contains an incident reporting form to be used alongside the

¹⁶ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/40/section/93>

¹⁷ <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/safe-and-effective-intervention-use-of-reasonable-force-and-searching-for-weapons.pdf>

HS11 form that could have been used by SMT but was not. It features a comprehensive checklist:

- *Were sufficient/appropriate mitigation steps taken?*
- *Were the physical interventions completely necessary?*
- *Were there grounds for using physical intervention?*
- *Was physical intervention used reasonably?*
- *Were approved physical interventions used?*
- *Was the physical intervention used commensurate with the incident?*
- *Were appropriate/adequate steps taken after the incident?*
- *Is the reporting process complete and comprehensive?*

Professional opinion on these points is key where there is a complaint or allegation of abuse. This information was not available to LA1 C&FS in assessing this or other referrals relating to the use of restrictive processes by staff at Ysgol Friars.

In concluding matters, a heavy emphasis was placed on Foden's statement and the legal ambiguity around what constitutes reasonable force and its acceptable use. Consideration at this level of detail to interpret legislation detracts from the overarching principle of prevention, proportionality and of taking a trauma informed, child-centred approach to child protection matters. *Keeping Learners Safe, 2022* states that:

'To be judged lawful, the force used would need to be in proportion to the consequences it is intended to prevent. The degree of force used should be the minimum needed to achieve the desired result.'

The *Reducing Restrictive Practices Framework, 2022*¹⁸ seeks to ensure that where restrictive practices are used, they are done so as a last resort. The Reviewers contend that greater consideration should have been given to assessing the need for this type of intervention.

This was a missed opportunity

Ultimately, interpretation of legislation is a matter for the courts, acknowledged in a note appended to the minutes of the meeting. However, the Reviewers are of the opinion that the above referenced national guidance on when and to what degree restrictive practice should be used is clear.

In concluding that no further action could be taken, LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO, the Chair, stated that *'this is the length of our capacity to action.... it will be the responsibility of the governing body...to deal with matters thoroughly'*. He added that failure by them will draw attention from Estyn during their inspections. Specifically, it was recommended that the Chair of Governors review the incident, their governance

¹⁸ <https://www.gov.wales/reducing-restrictive-practices-framework-html>

and compliance around the school's Reasonable Force Policy, and the requirement for staff training. This should include further training for Foden.

A further recommendation required LA1 Ed to consider staff use of phones to film such incidents and the need for a country-wide review of the use of reasonable force. This was in contrast LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO recommendation a month earlier in concluding matters relating to Child J, and points to an acknowledged lack of clarity which would have impacted on the decision reached, and potentially the assessment of the ongoing risk to children posed by Foden and by his male Core SMT staff.

A broader recommendation made by the Chair, LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO, was that the wording of procedures about the threshold of being considered unsuitable to work with children required careful consideration, although he did not allocate this action to a specific person or agency.

LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO sent a letter to Foden and the Chair of Governors laying out their findings. In his response Foden did not agree that any of the concerns were justified. This should have raised concerns and heightened focus on the need to monitor Foden's behaviours going forward but did not do so.

No alternative disciplinary process was discussed despite the strength of feeling about the disproportionality of Foden's response to the incident, and regardless of it not meeting Section 5 thresholds. Legal advice could have been of assistance in this process, especially in light of Child I's ALN.

This was a missed opportunity

There is no record of a response from the Chair of Governors or of any further action in response to the recommendations made to the Governing Body, or of any subsequent monitoring. Records of the Section 5 Professional Strategy Meeting show that the Chair of Governors did not attend, nor would he have been aware of this investigation at the time, or of parallel proceedings and complaints about other, similar incidents involving Foden. As Foden was the Headteacher the Chair of Governors should have been informed about and involved in all such meetings.

It should also be noted that at this time, and in this information vacuum, the Chair of Governors acted alone with questionable authority to do so (see Theme 5: Governance and Complaints), in overturning a recommendation by LA1 Director C&FS, LA1 Head of Education 1, LA1 Head C&FS, LA1 Former Corp Dir, LA1 Legal that Foden should be suspended pending the outcome of the current investigation. The Chair of Governors acted on his personal view that '*the incident didn't really amount to anything*', discussions with LA1 Head of Education 1 who had only 'seen a clip' of the video, and Foden. Foden in turn drafted a letter for the Chair of Governors to send LA1 Head of Education 1 in his own name, laying out the Governing Body's preferred disciplinary option.

In addition to the documented cases of restraint shared with the Reviewers, the Review has since seen email correspondence and heard from parents in relation to other cases of restraint in Ysgol Friars. One case in particular gives cause for significant concern in its demonstration of the culture of the school and SMT towards such incidents, the impact that had on other staff in the school, the lack of or ignorance of Whistleblowing procedures as well as a lack of scrutiny by LA1. The evidence is based on emails shared in December 2021 between Foden, Core SMT 1 and DSP 2, their respective union representatives and LA1 Head of Education 1 and LA1 Ed3, with involvement of LA1 C&FS in these discussions.

The Review has seen evidence of a shared understanding amongst the SMT that decisions on making referrals to LA1 C&FS where staff have used restrictive practice on pupils were Foden's to make, as Headteacher. This understanding was based on Foden's manipulated, shared interpretation of ambiguities in guidance and policy. The policies were adopted *de facto* by the Core SMT and in turn, applied in their own restraints on pupils (by Core SMT 1 and DSP 2). The Review has seen evidence of discontent among these individuals when such matters were found to have been discussed among LA1 Head of Education 1 and LA1 Ed3 without their involvement.

This was the case when a pupil was restrained by Core SMT 1 and DSP 2 and caused alarm among other school staff who did not feel they could raise their concern through Ysgol Friars' safeguarding routes, as laid out in school policy, owing to those responsible for safeguarding in Ysgol Friars being both perpetrators and supporters of the behaviour in question. Instead, the member of staff raised it with their line manager who, in turn, reported these concerns to LA1 Ed3. The staff member expressing concern was advised to make a referral to the school Safeguarding team, despite the school DSP being the perpetrator of the concerning behaviour in question. The original concern '*lacked detail and gave a second-hand account*' resulting in LA1 Ed3 seeking further clarification. Ultimately LA1 Ed3 determined that the concern did not warrant a referral to LA1 C&FS and handed the case back to Foden for internal resolution, stating that this action was in line with school policy.

The Reviewers have seen extensive communication between LA1 Head of Education 1, Foden, those accused of this inappropriate use of restraint and their union representatives in trying to establish which member of staff raised concerns in the first place. In these emails, the teachers who had raised the alarm outside Ysgol Friars' processes were named. No consideration appears to have been given to the need to treat this matter with Whistleblowing confidentiality. A union representative of one of the accused staff members stated in a letter to their member, Core SMT 1, regarding the restraint allegation, that they '*presume [Foden] is not raising this as a disciplinary concern*'.

The Review has seen an email written by Foden stating

'I have no intention of taking any action internally as, having read the restraint reports, there has been no inappropriate conduct by staff in the school'.

This decision would have exacerbated a general mistrust among staff, further enabling and *justifying* in their view, the use of restraint by Foden and close male SMT

colleagues, whilst at the same time disempowering other staff who wished to intervene or raise the alarm. This also demonstrates a clear failure to recognise a need to implement Whistleblowing procedures.

At no point in this correspondence was there any mention made of the pupil or concern expressed for their welfare, providing clear evidence that Ysgol Friars' policy and its application prioritised protecting its own staff over the welfare of its pupils. In the Ysgol Friars Pupil Conduct Policy, for incidents of restraint, staff are encouraged to report incident details to their union representative rather than to complete an HS11 form and submit it to the Local Authority, an expectation set out in LA1's exemplar policy.

In 2015 the governance of the use of reasonable force and the interface with child protection procedures in LA1 Ed was identified as requiring attention. An internal report was duly commissioned, made recommendations, and was accepted by the Corporate Safeguarding Panel as part of its work plan. Actions relating to the Education Service were accepted by the LA1 Head of Education at the time. Falling outside of the Terms of Reference for this Review, the Reviewers have not seen this report but are clear that there remains a need to address gaps in the governance of restrictive practices.

Complying with county and national guidance in these matters should be a matter of quality assurance for corporate safeguarding arrangements. It is difficult to understand why a Governing Body would choose to oversee such deviation from such stringent guidance, and why this was not addressed by the Local Authority.

Theme 5: Governance and Complaints

During the time under Review, the Governing Body was chaired on a voluntary basis by an individual who was employed as Chief Inspector (CI) in NWP. He had been on the Governing Body since 2007, and Chair of Governors from 2016. The Vice Chair Gov 2 voluntary post was held by a Police Constable (PC) in NWP, and the Governing Body was under an established leadership. Some Governors felt that decisions were made by Foden, the Chair of Governors and Gov 2 together and then simply rubber stamped by the Governing Body. The Reviewers challenge that view. The Reviewers contend that decisions were made by Foden alone.

Foden publicly capitalised on the status of having two NWP Officers as Governors to approve his decisions, although acknowledged to the CPR Chair that they required his '*'prompting'* in their decision making. This dependency gave Foden control over his employer. The Reviewers have heard from previous Governors, one of whom, in challenging the *status quo* and raising issues of serious concern about the wider management of the school and its governance with the then Director of Education, under Whistleblowing procedures, felt that his continued involvement was made untenable by Foden very soon thereafter, to the point of feeling forced off the Governing Body.

An independent 'Critical Companion' employed by the LEA to sit with, train and oversee operations of the Governing Body in 2020 found it to be largely operating under the direction of Foden. Evidence seen and heard by Reviewers support this view, with many decisions being made prior to Governing Body meetings, policies drawn up and amended by Foden, little meaningful challenge raised by members and challenges largely dismissed or overridden. There was a sense that members were either on board or not welcome. The Review has seen numerous examples of Foden having drafted letters for the Chair of Governors to send in their own name on matters that should not have involved discussion with Foden in the first place. There is evidence that the Chair of Governors had relied heavily on information and directives from Foden and the Core SMT, and that Foden had even been commissioned by the Chair of Governors to compile a Governors report on their behalf.

The Review has heard that there was a disproportionately high attendance at Governor meetings by senior management of Ysgol Friars, individuals referred to as the Core SMT, a peer-group of three, regarded by many staff to have been hand-picked by Foden and thus influential and difficult to challenge. Appointments were often made informally, and there was a tight working arrangement between Chair of Governors, Gov 2 and Foden.

A school's Governing Body has a statutory duty to establish effective policies and procedures around statutory areas of Complaints & Grievances, Pupil Discipline and Exclusions, Safeguarding and Child Protection, and to ensure their effective execution. LA1 provides exemplar policies which can be used or adapted for use by schools. LA1 also had officers available to schools seeking further advice about procedures and their application. The Chair of Governors has no power to act on the Governing Body's behalf without specific, prior written agreement by the Body, and only in rare circumstances where a delay, in order to convene a Governing Body meeting, would cause serious detriment to the interests of the school (Welsh Government publication on *Governing Body Procedures 2021*¹⁹). The Review has evidenced that key decisions were made outside of this arrangement, in discussion with Foden, and accepted unchallenged.

A Local Authority should satisfy itself that the school has adequate policies in place and maintain oversight that a school has followed its procedure to safeguard and promote the well-being of children. LA1 was aware that the school operated under its own policies which, at times, deviated significantly from LA1's exemplar policies and those of the Welsh Government. These included key omissions and additions in some areas that do not appear to have been challenged but were often quoted by LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO as Foden's defence, and accepted, during Section 5 Professional Strategy Meetings in consideration of concerns relating to Foden.

During investigations into restraint practices for example, Foden stated in his defence that he had followed policy and guidance. This was accepted at face value, without adequate external scrutiny, making it '*very difficult to argue that Foden's behaviour would make it inappropriate for him to work with children*', with an onus put on Governors to '*deal with matters thoroughly*'. When questioned, Foden claimed that, as

¹⁹ <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-10/2021-chapter-2-governing-bodies-their-powers-duties-and-relationships.pdf>

a school, they used Local Authority policies which he then 'tweaked'. Schools can choose to use the exemplar policies or not and are responsible for ensuring they are executed correctly, and Governors are responsible for ensuring their implementation. The DSP also plays a critical role in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of pupils and is responsible for ensuring policies and procedures are in place and are followed. Senior Local Authority Education officers must in turn satisfy themselves and the Authority that these policies are adequate and aligned with their own procedures.

In satisfying their responsibility for monitoring compliance, Governing Bodies should undertake an annual review of policies and procedures that includes consideration of how their responsibilities have been discharged. This would include monitoring of complaints handling and behaviours found lacking following implementation of Child Protection procedures. The Reviewers have seen no evidence of such monitoring.

Governors must know enough about safeguarding to be able to sufficiently challenge a school's safeguarding policy and practice and satisfy themselves that safeguarding procedures are robust. The Governing Body at Ysgol Friars took reassurance from remarks made in Estyn's 2017 Survey that:

'The Governors have a solid understanding of the strengths of the school and areas for improvement. They provide an appropriate level of challenge and support for the school'

and quoted this when their competence was later challenged (see Complaints against Governors, below).

In respect of allegations of abuse made against a Headteacher, the Chair of Governors is responsible for liaising with statutory agencies and ensuring that due process is followed. This is covered in the Theme 2 Managing Allegations. The Chair of Governors was often not informed or involved in consideration of such allegations however, often only being alerted to a concern by receipt of a letter outlining outcomes of a Section 5 Meeting.

In April 2019 Core SMT 1 made a conscious decision not to inform Chair of Governors and Gov 2 about his concerns relating to Foden's behaviour with respect to Child A as he felt there were sensitivities around their role as Governors and their profession. No attempt was made to involve an alternative member of the Governing Body with responsibility for safeguarding and Core SMT 1 took his concerns straight to the LA1 Ed1.

Guidance is clear that final responsibility for staffing and disciplinary matters regarding the Headteacher rests firmly with the Board of Governors of the school, who must also be mindful of any advice they receive from the Local Authority. The Chair of Governors, however, has no power to act on the Governing Body's behalf without specific prior, written instruction, unless under extreme or urgent circumstances. Such circumstances must be agreed and minuted at a Governing Body meeting. The Review have seen no evidence of any such minuted instruction. In matters of concern relating to the Headteacher, such processes should be conducted independently of the Headteacher's involvement.

The Review was made aware of two occasions where the Governing Body could have taken decisive action:

1. EWC/ICC: the disciplinary decision following the EWC guilty finding against Foden. September 2020
2. A recommendation made to Chair of Governors by Senior LA1 Officers that they should suspend Foden in November 2021

EWC/ICC Reports

In September 2017 a member of staff took their employer, Ysgol Friars, to an employment tribunal alleging unfair treatment. In January 2018 the tribunal ruled in their favour. In May 2018 the staff member lodged a formal complaint against the whole Governing Body of Ysgol Friars for the associated role they had played. An independent investigator was commissioned to carry out an investigation and in turn recommended a formal, independent review of the quality of Ysgol Friars' governance. In March 2019 LA1 commissioned an investigation by an Independent Complaints Panel (ICC), who considered the original complaints, but also took a line on School Governance, presenting their findings in June 2019 before the EWC concluded their investigation into this matter.

The ICC found that:

- *The Governing Body lacked an understanding of the issues in front of them and was overly dependent on the opinion of the Headteacher or Senior Staff.*
- *The Headteacher and Governing Body were unaware that the school website did not contain a list of Governor names and designated roles.*
- *Governors appeared to have a loose grip on matters of governance.*

The ICC recommended that

'unless significant and decisive action was taken in response to the report by the end of the Autumn Term 2019, the LEA should issue a warning notice to the Governing Body in accordance with its powers of intervention under the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013²⁰ and the issued Welsh Government Guidance 222/2017²¹'.

LA1 Head of Education 1 and '*the [Local] Authority*' agreed the need to make sure that the recommendations were followed up within this timeframe and offered LA assistance to the school if required. This explicit expectation was shared by LA1 Head of Education 1 with Foden and the Chair of Governors. It was made very clear that meeting this deadline would negate the need for further intervention.

²⁰ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2013/1/contents>

²¹ <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/schools-causing-concern-statutory-guidance-for-schools-and-local-authorities.pdf>

Following the EWC's Autumn 2020 finding, there had been a 2-year period during which it was widely known that Foden had been found guilty of Professional Misconduct in relation to a staff member of Ysgol Friars but remained employed as a Headteacher by LA1. The Reviewers are aware that a Councillor had made several enquiries to LA1 Ed regarding any actions that had or would be taken in light of this finding but had not been told of any. The Councillor continued to contact LA1 Ed, representing a number of constituents who had expressed the same dismay that nothing appeared to have been done, and no sanctions imposed on Foden as a result of the EWC finding.

Reluctantly, and under pressure from LA1 Head of Education 1, Foden, the Chair of Governors and Governor 2 accepted recommendations in the Report and began to draw up an action plan. This was finally sent to LA1 Head of Education 1 in late October 2019 close to the deadline set by the ICC and LA1. This action plan would see a Critical Companion appointed by the LEA to sit on the Governing Body and provide training to Foden and members of the Governing Body and oversee updates to Ysgol Friars website to include details of the full Governing Body by name and role. Additional actions in this plan related to employment and disciplinary considerations and actions that should be taken by the Governing Body in the event of the EWC investigation finding Foden, their employee, guilty of unacceptable professional conduct.

Records of the next Governors' meeting, 15 July 2019 demonstrate Foden, the Chair of Governors and Gov 2's overall dismissive view of the ICC report findings – stating that they believed they had good understanding and were in control of the issues raised, reflecting that '*the Estyn report [found] contrary to the points contained in the report.*' Records also state that Foden explained to the Governing Body that, if found guilty by the EWC, '*the case would have to come back to the Governing Body and make a decision on whether any action should be taken against [Foden].*' This was repeated in notes following a Governors' meeting on 21 October 2019.

In September 2020 the EWC found Foden guilty of Professional Misconduct and issued, a two-year reprimand, which would end in September 2022. In light of the EWC's guilty finding, LA1 HR's advice to LA1 Head of Education 1, expressed in turn by him in a letter to the Chair of Governors, asked the Chair of Governors to consider whether:

- Formal procedures would be followed, or
- Informal procedures, with a submission of professional advice given to Foden

The second of these options was noted by LA1 HR and LA1 Head of Education 1 as being considered to be the appropriate response.

LA1 HR added in a note to LA1 Head of Education 1,

'I would like to point out, I am quoting the Discipline Policy/procedure we have approved for schools – I don't know if Ysgol Friars have accepted this policy in its entirety/modification or done something themselves.'

The Reviewers have seen no evidence of this having been considered further.

The Reviewers have however seen evidence in Foden's email exchanges on 28 September 2020 where he refers to a '*Friday evening chat*' between LA1 Head of Education 1 and Foden, regarding Foden's plan to send Chair of Governors his '*plan of action*'.

Foden claimed that during this apparently informal telephone conversation, LA1 Head of Education 1 made it clear that he '*didn't propose to take any action*' following the EWC guilty finding but wanted to be prepared. The CPR have seen no evidence that this was the case, but it was clear that no further action was taken when the EWC guilty finding came in.

Foden duly advised the Chair of Governors to email LA1 Head of Education 1, copying in the Critical Companion (who had been employed by the LA to sit on the Governing Body). In this email, the Chair of Governors was instructed by Foden to ask if the ICC recommendation for a hearing by Disciplinary sub-Committee (formal procedures) had to happen, and if not, stated that as the Chair of Governors, he '*could legitimately decide to take no further action*'.

Foden in his advice to the Chair of Governors on what this email should contain, goes on to describe the vast body of evidence that the Chair of Governors would have to assemble should he decide on the first of the two options i.e. formal action. Foden reassured the Chair of Governors, that in the event of the Union objecting to the decision made (assuming the Chair of Governors opts to proceed by way of informal procedures) that the Union's grounds for complaint could summarily be dismissed, with Foden proceeding to list possible scenarios and the grounds the Chair of Governors could use for dismissing each in turn.

An independent report, commissioned by LA1 has recently [July 2025], been published, the author of which evidently had not been aware of the informal Friday night chat, nor of Foden's close involvement in the drafting of the letter regarding the choice of which disciplinary processes would be followed in light of the EWC finding of guilt.

By 15 October 2020, the Chair of Governors had received a response to the email composed and sent to LA1 Head of Education 1 and the Critical Companion, as instructed by Foden.

The Chair of Governors, in breach of confidence, immediately shared the response with Foden by email, adding '*FYI only and in CONFIDENCE*', that '**We can discuss later (soon), come up with an action plan and move on**' (emphasis as in original email).

Confidences were breached in sharing of the various emails which outlined the disciplinary options for dealing with Foden. Foden himself was involved, if not

instrumental in, orchestrating key discussions, even in the Chair of Governor asking LA1 Head of Education 1 if there was a third option- ‘*to do nothing*’. LA1 Head of Education 1 said this was not favoured.

Another meeting was held on 6 November 2020 between the Chair of Governors, Gov 2 and Foden to discuss these matters. Cyngor Gwynedd HR and LA1 Head of Education 1 were not aware of this meeting at the time. It transpired from having later seen these minutes that they include, somewhat misleadingly, that

‘The LA have been consulted prior to the meeting about our proposed course of action and the outcome of the meeting and supports our approach and decision. No action will be taken against [Foden] and the matter is now closed.’

This conclusion contradicts a recommendation in the ICC report that the matter should be considered by a Disciplinary sub-Committee through formal procedures, and of there having been an expectation by LA1 HR and LA1 Head of Education 1 that professional guidance would be given to Foden, that a period of monitoring would follow and a warning that ‘*if similar happen[ed] again, we’d need to consider more stringent steps*’.

Governors had in fact taken no action on the LA’s offer of support or guidance and there is no documented evidence that they discussed monitoring progress against the action plan. LA1 HR acknowledged the poor relationship between Ysgol Friars and ‘*the County*’ as they were known to be referred to.

There are worrying gaps in the Governing Body’s meeting minutes about what was shared, with who and when. It could be surmised that key content and information was not shared with the Governing Body, contravening an expectation on them to have done so in the interests of transparency and accountability, and that the decision was based solely on a three-way conversation between Foden, the Chair of Governors and Gov 2, despite Foden’s earlier explanation to the Governing Body that if found guilty by the EWC, ‘*...the case would have to come back to the Governing Body and make a decision on whether any action should be taken*’. This does not appear to have happened, neither have the Reviewers seen evidence that the other governors were aware of or challenged this. The matter does not appear on Governing Body agendas thereafter.

The Governing Body went against a recommendation in EWC and ICC reports and in their own action plan in concluding matters outside of formal disciplinary procedures, which would have been held before a Disciplinary Hearing panel. Instead, matters were concluded between Foden, the Chair of Governors and Gov 2. They also defied LA1 HR and Education in **not** issuing Foden with professional advice as had been provided in outline by LA1 in the event of concluding matters outside of formal procedures.

In reporting back to the LEA following a fixed period employed as Critical Companion on the Governing Body of Ysgol Friars, it was shared that:

- Governors '*put a lot upon the Local Authority – they did not seem to understand the responsibility they had as a Governing Body – the LA was not the body responsible, the Governing Body was.*
- The *[Governing Body] are still very much a Headteacher led group.*
- *The Governing Body were reluctant to intervene in any way. [Foden]’s a strong character and they tended to bow to his judgment*
- *Despite having placed a clear expectation on the group tasked with pulling together improvement actions for the Governing Body to review and monitor progress, the Group was yet to be appointed [when I left] and I didn’t see any evidence that it had been pulled together. Actions remained outstanding when I revisited by report in July 2021*

Monitoring the Governor's action plan has evidently not been robust; the most obvious visible sign being that Governor details on the school website were still incorrect even during the course of this Review, four years after the observations listed above were made.

Training in matters of governance was either ignored or inadequate, evidenced by poor compliance with some school policies, and in that policies are still not adequate or consistent with requirements set out by LA1 and The Welsh Government.

Without having seen the evidence, the Reviewers cannot comment on the mechanism put in place to monitor the outcomes of the action plan, but it appears that not all actions were completed in spite of the expectations placed on the school.

This was a missed opportunity

Suspension

In a meeting held on 12 November 2021 Senior Local Authority Officers, C&FS 1, LA1 Head of Education 1, Corporate Services, C&FS 2- agreed that Foden should be suspended pending the outcome of an ongoing investigation into the restraint of Child I. These officers were surprised that Chair of Governors had not already done so, based on the *Suspension Policy, Part 7, LA1 Governors handbook* (has since been removed from internet). LA1 Head of Education 1 communicated this decision to the Chair of Governors. The Chair of Governors appears to have then acted unilaterally in deciding not to suspend Foden but instead, on 15 November 2021, instructed him to work from home. A decision on the suspension of a Headteacher would usually be a decision for the whole Governing Body.

During the Chair of Governors' subsequent investigation into this matter, there was extensive email communication between Foden, DSP 2 and the Chair of Governors relating to the allegation of unreasonable force having been used in the restraint of Child I. It was established that Foden's safeguarding training was not up to date and that the associated MAPA guidance (see appendix 1), in Foden's words, did '*not*

advise refraining from restraining autistic pupils'. This discussion did not consider the overarching principles stated in national and regional guidance, and guidance in the *Equalities Act 2010*²² to the contrary.

The Reviewers have evidence from email exchanges between DSP 2 and Foden that his attitude to this training was that '*it was of such limited use and relevance in a secondary school that [he] did not repeat it*'. When interviewed for this Review by the CPR Chair, Foden noted that some of the training was in Welsh with limited translation and in his opinion, was not understood by staff. This view was also expressed by a former Governor.

DSP 2 also stated in correspondence with the Chair of Governors that the methods used in restraint were '*absolutely in keeping with the school policy and advice*' despite it having breached the policy requirement that staff should not (emphasis used in school Pupil Conduct Policy document) '*hold[ing] a pupil in a way as to restrict the ability to breathe*'. Foden is considered to have done this. DSP 2 also provided the Chair of Governors with an incomplete, thereby dishonest, account of the restraint methods used, along with assurances that no lasting emotional harm was done despite there having been no welfare checks carried out on Child I. Even though the parent requested ongoing support for her child in line with the requirement outlined in national guidance following such restraint incidents, this was not forthcoming and was found to be absent from the school's Pupil Conduct and Child Protection policies.

In conclusion, following the Chair of Governor's reflection on matters relating to the incident, he sent LA1 Head of Education 1 a letter, drafted for him by Foden, defending Foden's actions, point by point, and quoting in this letter additional, unscrutinised information on restraint guidance received from DSP 2. In the letter the Chair of Governors stated that he was '*convinced that [Foden] posed no risk to any pupils...*' nor that there were any '*...safeguarding issues*' and that it was therefore appropriate for Foden to return to work in the school. The Chair of Governors sent Foden an email within a week of requesting he works from home, stating that restraints were now lifted, and that he was free to return to Ysgol Friars '*tomorrow*', (22 November 2021).

In coming to this decision, the Chair of Governors had considered incomplete and incorrect information relating to the restraint of Child I by Foden. In so doing, he overrode decisive advice from LA1 Director C&FS, LA1 Head of Education 1, LA1 Head C&FS, LA1 Former Corp Dir, LA1 Legal who had based their recommendation on significantly more detail than had been available to the Chair of Governors. *Keeping Learners Safe, 2022*²³ states that

'While governing bodies have a role in exercising their disciplinary functions in respect of child protection allegations against a member of staff, they do not have a role in the consideration of individual cases'.

The Chair of Governors had indeed considered this matter in light of inadequate and incorrect information that had been provided to him on an individual case. Reviewers

²² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

²³ <https://www.gov.wales/keeping-learners-safe>

argue that there should not have been scope for a Chair of Governors to come to a decision on an individual basis equipped with an inadequate, unscrutinised set of facts. Such a significant decision should require a full, transparent consultation armed with as full and correct a set of facts as was available at the time. This key decision should not have been allowed to happen.

This was a missed opportunity

Critically, and in addition to the above, the Chair of Governor's decision was based on the incorrect assumption that '*there [had] been no further similar incidents involving [Foden]*'. This was factually incorrect. Had LA1 Head of Education 1 or LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO informed the Chair of Governors of the two other restraint cases that were being investigated at the time or had the Chair of Governors been notified of these allegations against the Headteacher at the time they arose, he would have been in a position to have made an informed decision. The Chair of Governors should also have been made aware of the ongoing investigation into Foden's conduct with Child G.

All of these incidents and investigations were taking place within the two-year reprimand period that followed the EWC having found Foden guilty of professional misconduct in relation to a staff member. The Chair of Governors also made his decision not to suspend Foden almost two months prior to the conclusion of the formal LA1 C&FS investigation into the Child I case.

Foden's ultimate reluctance to accept the conclusion and recommended actions following the conclusion of the Section 5 Professional Strategy Meeting on the restraint of Child I should have put a sharp focus on his behaviour going forward but appears not to have done so as the Review has seen no evidence of Chair of Governors having acted on the recommendations or of implementing any monitoring of actions or expectations.

Other Complaints

Welsh Government guidance states that complaints can be brought to a Governor of the school by anyone with an interest in the school and relate to a school and its provision of facilities, but that the Headteacher is ultimately responsible for the day-to-day management of a school. The Governing Body is required by law to consider formal complaints, including those made about a Headteacher's decision or complaints made against a Headteacher. The Governor's role is to explain and direct a complainant to the complaints Policy, and if necessary to refer back to the Headteacher to solve the problem - unless the subject of the complaint is the Headteacher.

If unresolved, the Chair of Governors can refer the matter to a Panel of Governors for consideration (with Local Authority help to ensure impartiality), inviting the complainant to the panel is usual practice. Governors must show regard to Welsh Government

guidance in establishing their own procedures. Ysgol Friars' Complaints Policy deviates significantly from that of the Welsh Government (discussed in Theme 4: Restraint Processes).

The LA1 Governors Handbook (no longer in use) does not extend to include provision for failure to resolve complaints and is inconsistent with Welsh Government policy in regard to how to proceed if complaints are not resolved by a Governor Complaints Panel. The Chair of Governors- or another member of the Governing Body chosen by him- should investigate complaints about the Headteacher, unless relating to matters that fall under other procedures.

When checked by Reviewers in June 2025, Ysgol Friars website showed a Complaints Policy that was out of date, contained names of staff who left over 2 years ago, referred to the Headteacher as '*He*' (despite the current Headteacher being female) and contained some sections edited with strike through as though in draft form. A timescale of 10 days is suggested for raising a complaint which will be dealt with informally through the:

- Head of Year (stage A),
- Formally (stage B) with the School Complaints Officer (an additional stage, relative to that advised in national guidance, and notes that a '*complaint dealt with by the Headteacher (stage C) is going to seem very serious and may, therefore not be easy to solve informally*'),
- or, failing resolution through A and B, through C, with the Headteacher who will seek to respond within 10 days.
- A fourth stage outlined in Ysgol Friars Complaints Policy would require a complaint to be passed on to the Governing Body who should acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 5 days and schedule a resolution meeting within 15 days. The headteacher is permitted to also attend this meeting in contravention of National Guidance, and at a risk to impartiality. This guidance states '*The headteacher should not be a member of the complaints committee because of prior involvement*'.

The Reviewers are aware that Ysgol Friars routinely breached their own complaints policy. Complaints procedures were not always followed nor responses to complaints made within the agreed timeframe, and some were ignored altogether. Complaints directed to the Governing Body but delivered via the school (in the absence of Governor details being available on Ysgol Friars website) were not always passed on to Governors. Recording of complaints by Ysgol Friars is poor and inconsistent.

Where complainants were dissatisfied by Ysgol Friars' response to a complaint and escalated their complaint to the Governors and LA1 some were dismissed as being vexatious or '*scattergun*' in their approach. Complainants were told that future complaints from them would not be considered. This response was in line with the school's complaints policy, which lists 12 reasons why the School might dismiss a complaint or complainant. Where complaints were not resolved, complainants were not told what other options were open to them, as is a requirement of national guidance.

Child Protection Policy

Governors are responsible for ensuring that school policies and procedures are consistent with those of the Welsh Government guidance on all aspects of Child Protection, including dealing with allegations of abuse made against staff. Ysgol Friars' Policy definition of abuse contained key omissions, most alarmingly around grooming behaviours.

In February 2021 Foden's response to DSP 2, when feeding back on his recent safeguarding training, was that LA1 training was incorrect, and Foden proceeded to instruct his SMT to act otherwise. In so doing, Foden overrode LA1 training guidance that had stated that all matters relating to Child Protection should be referred to Children's Services. Foden stated instead that such matters should be investigated by the Headteacher, placing the responsibility of whether or not to refer solely on himself (unless concerns related to him, in which case they should be directed to the Chair of Governors).

In listing the four instances which would require referral upon initial assessment, and why under some instances, a referral would not be necessary, Foden proceeded to list instances which would **not** require a referral, quoting the now repealed s.550A of the Education Act 1996. He relied heavily on sections of guidance which require subjective interpretation e.g. what amounts to reasonable force, inappropriate behaviour/ poor practice by a member of staff and how to define significant harm. In applying his own interpretation of guidance documents, Foden singularly awarded himself the authority to override the guidance on requirements to refer safeguarding concerns and undermined a culture of positive safeguarding. The consequences of this are discussed in Theme 4, Restrictive Practices.

Exclusions

Ysgol Friars is the largest Secondary school in LA1, representing approximately 25% of LA1's secondary pupils. Permanent exclusions in Ysgol Friars are consistently disproportionately high relative to the size of the school. Education data state that between 2017-2023 exclusions were the highest across the county, accounting for 31.7% of LA1 schools' permanent exclusions.

The law requires that the Governors' Discipline sub-committee must meet to consider long-term temporary exclusions (more than 15 school days in any one term²⁴) and to confirm permanent exclusions. Parents are invited to make representations at these hearings on behalf of the child. The Reviewers do not know if this policy is always

²⁴ <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-11/exclusion-from-schools-pupil-referral-units.pdf>

followed but know the high exclusion rate at Ysgol Friars had been a point of contention with the Education Department for a number of years.

Of greater concern is the lack of data relating to the disproportionate number of pupils with ALN/ ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) who have suffered at the application of the '*three strikes and you're out*' School Discipline Policy, and who have been '*encouraged to leave*' in order to '*protect their academic record*' and '*avoid having an exclusion against their name*', in so doing, and by definition, also protecting the school from being seen as having excessive exclusions.

The Reviewers have heard from pastoral staff at Ysgol Friars and in the LA1 Ed that some children were purposefully, repeatedly targeted and matters deliberately escalated by Foden and the Core SMT with a view to quickly meeting the threshold for exclusion. One staff contributor to the Review commented that '*Within a single day, their secondary education could be over.*'

Even following Foden's arrest, at a time when anxieties and confusion were heightened and support was needed in the school community, pupils were told by Core SMT 1 in assembly, whilst sharing an agreed Core SMT message, that they would be excluded if found to be talking about matters relating to the arrest. This was an inappropriate response to a community in shock and trauma.

The Review has heard and seen numerous instances of clear breaches of process, policy and procedures, where reporting of concerns has been mis-managed and has resulted not only in an increase in the risk posed to safeguarding pupils, but also distress caused to employees. During this process, the Reviewers have heard from staff who were unaware either of the existence of whistleblowing procedures or lacked the required knowledge about when and how Whistleblowing procedures could or should be invoked.

All members of staff should know how to and be able to raise concerns safely, without fear of repercussion or retribution, about any conduct or practice in school which they perceive to be improper or unsafe. All staff must have confidence that their concerns will be heard and handled properly. There is an urgent need to inform all staff about the option of whistleblowing where they feel, for whatever reason, compromised in raising these concerns through the usual safeguarding routes. Information is available in the Welsh Government's *Procedures for Whistleblowing in Schools and Model Policy guidance, 2007*²⁵.

Theme 6: Crisis Planning and Crisis Response

The response by Ysgol Friars and consequently LA1 C&FS and other statutory agencies to the disclosure made by Child D on 6 September 2023 highlighted the lack of a coordinated emergency or crisis response plan in either organisation.

²⁵ <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/procedures-for-whistleblowing-in-schools-and-model-policy.pdf>

Senior leaders managing safeguarding in schools, other organisations, statutory services and the local authority need to have a clear brief, including a communication plan in place ahead of any crisis facing the school, including the abuse of children.

The priority response in a crisis should be to keep the child or children safe, and in order to do this staff need to be clear about their other roles, responsibilities and reporting lines. They need guidance on media management, particularly where a case involves a high-profile individual or group.

Care for victims must be trauma-informed and prioritised, but agencies must also recognise their duty of care to employees and understand that this duty will be ongoing and likely require additional resources, both human and financial.

When concerns were raised about Foden in 2019 the response was not formally coordinated and decisions about actions to be taken were not formally recorded. This has been a matter of ongoing discussion and debate throughout the course of the Review and without doubt exposed children to risk of further abuse by Foden. It has also left LA1 open to criticism from the media, community and school.

On 6 September 2023 there was again a lack of coordinated response from the agencies dealing with this matter. A careful analysis of actions taken on the day of the disclosure demonstrated the need for a process that is understood by all agencies, and which can be implemented quickly in the face of a crisis, as in this case, where many staff were in a state of shock.

At about 09:00 on 6 September 2023 Child D spoke to a member of pastoral staff at Ysgol Friars disclosing that she had been '*in a romantic relationship*' with Foden. She was later able to show evidence of sexualised messages on her mobile phone to the DDSP. Although Foden's details had been saved under a pseudonym, the phone number from which messages were sent was identified as being his. The content clearly indicated that a crime had been committed.

DSP 2 was not in school on the day of disclosure and the DDSP sought telephone advice from LA1 C&FS front desk describing the content of the messages. LA1 C&FS record that this was reported to them at around 10.45. The DDSP did not follow the school policy to alert LA1 Ed or the County Designated Officer for Safeguarding nor did they manage to establish contact with the Chair of Governors until early afternoon, despite having tried. It is thought that Core SMT 1 had contacted LA1 Head of Education 1, but this was not part of a co-ordinated response and there are no corresponding records.

When the DDSP contacted LA1 C&FS front desk DDSP was also still trying to keep Child D safe. Child D was hidden in a large cupboard on site for several hours. At the point of referral, the DDSP had not contacted NWP, was not asked by LA1 C&FS if they **had** called NWP and was not advised that they **should** call NWP immediately. Instead, the DDSP was asked to fill in the standard referral form and send copies of the WhatsApp messages that had been secured from Child D's phone. Whilst the referral form was being completed and Child D remained in the cupboard, Foden had tried to gain access to her but was physically blocked by the DDSP.

There had been no immediate risk assessment for Child D. Foden's access to school IT systems had not been blocked or frozen and hardware not secured. There had been no discussion of the possibility that Foden may not have been working alone, or that he may have other victims in the school who he could access during this period. Basic child protection procedures to keep the child safe, secure evidence, and contain the alleged perpetrator were not immediately followed by the school or LA1 C&FS causing added trauma to the victim/survivors.

LA1 C&FS receipt of the completed referral form 11:19, and accompanying evidence 11:55 triggered LA1 C&FS to advise the DDSP to telephone NWP which they did at 12:21. A Strategy Discussion was then held with NWP 12:54 resulting in the decision that NWP should attend the school. At 13:17 confirmation was recorded that NWP and LA1 C&FS had also held a s.47 Strategy Meeting. Foden had in the meantime been at the school and in his office. During this time, he was able to delete information from his electronic devices. This information was subsequently recovered by NWP.

Professionals who had received the disclosure were in shock and would have benefitted from a clear plan to follow. Their response was uncoordinated and inefficient.

Whilst the DDSP was referring the matter and speaking to LA1 C&FS, some information had reached LA1 Head of Education 1 who had been in a meeting of senior officers in LA1. At the end of the meeting, he asked officers to stay behind in order that he could appraise them of the situation at Ysgol Friars, and he confirmed that LA1 C&FS were aware and that the police were '*ar y ffordd*' -on the way.

There was no formal plan for SMT to follow and there is no record of who contacted the Chair of Governors (or when he was contacted) although it appeared that he was made aware of the situation ahead of any formal notification from LA1 Head of Education 1 or LA1 C&FS. It is not known whether he had become aware of the situation through his professional role in the NWP; LA1 C&FS Senior Manager LADO, who had been '*sighted*' on the issue was concerned that this was '*out of process*'.

When the DDSP contacted NWP at 12:21 the detail provided suggested that there was no immediate risk [to Child D] demonstrating a lack of understanding of risk and the impact on Child D of staying on site. In addition, the DDSP had indicated that Foden was unaware of the allegation. However, whilst Foden may not have had the details of the disclosure he had already tried to access Child D and failing that he was able to access IT equipment. This resulted in NWP recording '*There is no suggestion from the caller that there was immediate risk to necessitate an urgent response*'. However, the matter was escalated to NWP Silver Group at this time.

Plain clothes NWP attended the school at about 14:00 and Foden was arrested. Child D had remained hidden at the school throughout this period and continued to remain concealed on the school site even after Foden's arrest and until she was spoken to by professionals from LA1 C&FS and the police.

With no crisis management plan in place to respond to this situation, concerns about '*getting it wrong*', not following process, lack of transparent discussion between departments and politicisation of decision-making all played a part in drift and delay in

apprehending Foden. NWP and LA1 C&FS should have been deployed to the school immediately upon referral.

The Reviewers have seen no evidence of a clear or coordinated communication or support plan being put in place by either the School or LA1 Ed following Foden's arrest.

On 10 September 2023 the Core SMT sent a message (copied below) to all school staff advising them on how to respond to parents and pupils. This was not conducted in a trauma-informed manner and demonstrated little understanding of the impact the revelation of Foden's abuse of pupils would have on the wider school community.

Sent: 10 September 2023 21:17
To: [names redacted by Reviewers]
Subject: Message from SMT

Dear all,

We know this has been a very stressful and anxious time for you all and you are still struggling to process your emotions and reactions to the announcement on Friday. We will have three counsellors on site from Monday if any of you feel that you need to speak to someone. Please contact [x] and she will liaise with DDSP and the counselling team regarding appointments and see if [they] can organise cover to release you for any initial appointments. Core SMT's door are also always open. Alternatively, you can contact Medra, Education Mutual (the teacher sickness absence company) or Education Support (a specialist support service for all staff in education).

'On Monday we will be holding a series of assemblies with all year groups. They will be told where they can access counselling and support. They will be reassured that they are safe in school. However, they will be told that staff cannot talk about the case so they must not ask them about it. They will be reminded that if they do spread rumours on social media they could be excluded from school or interviewed by the police.'

'We suggest you use the following as a script if pupils are discussing it in class and proceed according to the usual school policy for not following a warning':

'I cannot talk about the case, now let's carry on with the lesson.'

If they persist:

'You were told in assembly that you cannot ask about the case. I cannot talk about the case. If you carry on asking or discussing the matter despite this warning, I will have to treat this as defiance, and you may be referred to senior management and you could be excluded.'

Thank you for all your support,

SMT

The email continued with the following

'Below is a transcript of the messages Core SMT 1 and DSP 2 will deliver in assembly':

Core SMT 1

'You may have seen or heard the news that Mr Foden was charged on Friday with very serious offences.

In law, a person is innocent unless they are proven guilty. That will be decided in the crown court in a few weeks or months' time.

The police are still investigating. Staff in school cannot talk about the case, so you must not ask them about it.

The school will continue to run normally. All the school rules still apply, including the one about not misusing modern technology.

You must not spread rumours or discuss the case in any way, especially on social media or in any messaging service. If you do you could be excluded from school and you may even be interviewed by the police as part of their investigation.

If you know anything that could help the police you should speak to your Head of Year, Head of Key Stage DSP 2 or to DDSP as soon as possible after this assembly. You can also speak to Core SMT 3

Friars is an excellent school. Last year our exam results made us the best comprehensive school in North Wales. This year they were every bit as good, if not better. That is down to you and your teachers and what you do in class and for homework. None of that will change.

DSP 2 will now remind you what you can do if you have been affected by this news'.

DSP 2

'Given the events that Core SMT 1 has described, we have not only arranged additional support for you in school but also wanted to remind you all of the support available in school already.

This week, we have arranged for three additional counsellors to attend school for staff and pupils. This is in addition to those available by appointment during the week. Pastoral and Child Protection staff are also available, and I will remind you about who they are in a moment. If you are particularly affected by events last week, please see your Head of Year (or equivalent) in the first instance and they will liaise with the office manager if it's felt that seeing a counsellor or member of the child protection team would be more

appropriate. During lessons, if you need support, ask your teacher to email your Head of Year.

I've included a few contact numbers for mental health support out of school as well and I will have this presentation displayed around school.

The Child Protection Team is as follows: I am the Safeguarding lead in school and X is the Deputy Safeguarding person. We are both available to see you at any time, if you or anyone you know is at risk of harm.'

On the 8 September 2023 a Wales Safeguarding Procedures Section 5 Professional Strategy Meeting was convened in regard to Foden. The Chair of Governors did not attend, nominating in his place DSP 2. This was not an appropriate substitution and should have been subject to discussion with the Vice Chair or other nominated member of the Governing Body in attendance.

On the 11 of September 2023 a meeting of senior officers of LA1 was convened (see page 28 for details).

A record of an extraordinary meeting of the Governing Body held on 14 September 2023 at the school noted that the press had become aware of the situation and that there were messages circulating on social media before a planned statement had been made.

Theme 7: Training and Curriculum

Welsh Government guidance *Keeping Learners Safe 2022*²⁶, states that all schools and colleges in Wales have a legal duty to protect and promote the well-being of children. This duty includes the requirement to appoint a DSP (Deputy Safeguarding Person) who has lead responsibility for managing child protection within the school.

It is a requirement of *Keeping Learners Safe 2022*, that the Headteacher must appoint a suitable number of DSPs and Deputies for their setting and ensure they have access to the required levels of training and support to undertake the role, including online safety training. The DSP need not be a teacher but must be a senior member of staff and should have equal status and access to the same training.

The Review identified (Theme 1- Impact of Status, Power and Culture) that Foden deliberately created a culture where the safeguarding and pastoral functions in place in Ysgol Friars were weak and staff depended on him for direction, advice and decision making.

Although there was an appropriate process in place for appointing staff to Ysgol Friars, Foden was able to dominate and control this process and recruit tactically and

²⁶ <https://www.gov.wales/keeping-learners-safe>

strategically according to perceived loyalty, malleability and weakness of potential candidates whilst simultaneously circumventing the input of other staff and Governors who might more usually be involved in the recruitment process. This would appear to be the circumstance under which DSP 2 was appointed. During the Review some SMT expressed that they had been surprised by some of the appointments made by Foden when more suitable candidates had been in the field and were not successful.

When Foden appointed DSP 2 he had not completed the required level of safeguarding training for the role. Foden also elevated the officer manager to DDSP although they were not on the senior leadership team, as would usually be a requirement of that position, or trained to an adequate level. Arguably, even with appropriate training and experience, the appointment of one DSP and one DDSP was insufficient for a school of 1400 pupils.

There was no record of training in the school despite *Keeping Learners Safe Guidance 2022* stating clearly that

'the DSP must keep a record of all staff training, including the dates, details of the provider and a record of staff attendance'

and Core SMT 1 said he had not had Child Protection training other than the refresher delivered annually by the local Authority Designated Lead Officer of Safeguarding for Education.

Keeping Learners Safe 2022 also states that the local authority should ensure that the DSP, the designated governor for safeguarding and the Chair of Governors undertake training in inter-agency working that is provided by or to standards agreed by the SCB (in this case NWSB), as well as refresher training to keep their knowledge and skills up to date, in addition to basic safeguarding training. The Reviewers have not seen evidence of any training record kept in the school or by the local authority.

Foden was a skilled manipulator who, in addition to grooming victims, groomed the environment in which he worked, thus hiding his offending behaviour by offering '*counselling*' and pastoral care to female pupils who were known to be vulnerable. Foden had no qualification or training to undertake this work other than his belief that '*he was good at it*'. A lack of staff training coupled with poor record keeping meant that Foden's patterns of behaviour were not recognised and not recorded.

The lack of understanding of professional standards, safeguarding procedures and safeguarding training even at senior staff and officer levels is a key theme of the Review. Core SMT 1 and LA1 Head of Education 1 (the latter having previously been a Headteacher in the authority) each reported that they had not had safeguarding training commensurate with their roles. This notwithstanding, the long-standing requirement is that all staff have refresher training every two years and that this training should include how to recognise and respond to abuse and how to report concerns.

Foden himself refused to attend a safeguarding course that he anticipated '*wouldn't teach him anything new*'. Following the death of the DSP 1 there were reported gaps in safeguarding training. Foden's attitude when challenged on this by LA1 Designated Schools Safeguarding Lead was '*what do you have for my staff that I don't have and can't pass [on] to my staff?*' This challenge was not addressed at the time or training provided.

The Designated Schools Safeguarding Lead for Education (LA1 Ed3) should ensure that all schools are following statutory guidance, that teachers and school governors have all the training, support and advice they need and that all staff have up-to-date safeguarding training. It is stated in *Keeping Learners Safe 2022* that:

'the lead officer will know and support each school's DSP and designated safeguarding governor and ensure that all schools have policies and steps for dealing with issues, including allegations against staff and that schools do the right employment checks, including DBS checks'.

No member of staff in any agency or local authority department spoken to during the course of this Review referred to this role or the support they could offer and there is evidence that school policies diverged from the LA1 exemplar in such a way that enabled Foden to have control over the safeguarding process. There is no evidence of oversight of this from the LA1 senior officers in education.

In addition to lack of training, school staff's understanding of safeguarding responsibilities and procedures was based on a confounding mix of school policies that were inconsistent or contradictory to those produced by LA1 and Welsh Government. Moreover, as evidenced throughout this Review, Foden in any case openly flouted the policies that he himself had put in place.

Governor approval of school policies, including safeguarding, was also closely managed and directed by Foden who was perceived to be an expert in the field. Foden was able to wrong-foot his staff by making changes to policies which were not shared with staff until it became apparent that the policy had been breached – at which point an individual could be publicly disciplined by Foden.

Another theme identified by this Review was that school staff were not equipped to understand the *modus operandi* of sex offenders or recognise sex offender grooming. By assuming a lead pastoral role at the school Foden had placed himself in a position where he had a *prima facie* reason to hold 1:1 meetings with some of the most vulnerable pupils in the school under the guise of providing pastoral support. As a sophisticated offender Foden had successfully groomed the adults around him and excluded those who may have acted as protective factors for his victims. Foden had normalised his behaviours, operating in plain sight of his Core SLT, teaching and administrative staff and pupils. That he saw vulnerable female pupils alone in his room was an '*open secret*'.

Professionals working in Ysgol Friars and LA1 did not recognise Foden's grooming behaviours either, and where there were concerns about his interaction with pupils these were not viewed from the perspective of potential risk of harm to a child, but only through a lens of the potential for a child or children to make malicious or false allegations against Foden. Professionals, including those working at senior level and in specialist positions in a number of agencies, did not objectify Foden's behaviours or ask of themselves and each other reflective questions such as:

- *why is a male head of school accompanying a female child to medical appointments?*
- *does Foden have training to offer counselling?*
- *why is Foden only offering counselling 1:1 with vulnerable female pupils - why is he not offering counselling to vulnerable male pupils?*
- *how does the Headteacher of a large school have time to have so many 1:1 meetings with vulnerable female pupils?*
- *why is Foden flouting the rules - holding 1:1 meetings in his room, with the door shut, lights off and blinds down, and taking female pupils in his car?*

A lack of simple professional curiosity enabled Foden to continue his abuse in plain sight. This was a missed opportunity.

A further example is the description of Foden's interactions with Child F, reported first by the adults supporting her, and reiterated in her own description of his interactions. These have been described earlier in this Review and demonstrate the text-book grooming styles of sex offenders. However, even though Child F's own description of a hug from Foden was that it had made her feel uncomfortable. Child F was asked to demonstrate it, and the hug was subsequently dismissed as being '*not inappropriate*' by professionals who were assessing risk. The *pattern* of similar behaviours exhibited with a number of vulnerable female pupils (for example holding hands with children, Child G and Child F comments about an uncomfortable hug) was missed as was the clear unsuitability of an adult in a position of trust touching a child. The fact that each reported concern was treated in isolation, and without consideration of a wider context or pattern of behaviour only heightened the scale of the failure.

A working knowledge of the '*Finklehor Four Pre-conditions Model*' and being able to understand and recognise behaviours which may indicate that an adult is seeking to isolate and groom a child or children, is fundamental to reducing opportunities for adults such as Foden to sexually abuse children.

Curriculum

There is an indication that some of Foden's victims of sexual assault began to have some understanding that his behaviour towards them might amount to grooming. There was rumour and social media content to this effect and evidence that one of the victims/survivors had been searching for information on the internet using search terms relating to understanding grooming. Some victims/survivors had friends who warned them that Foden's behaviour was inappropriate, and one at least had a friend who encouraged them to speak to an adult. Education on grooming does not currently sit within the new Curriculum for Wales Framework, nor was it taught through the previous curriculum which is in the process of being phased out.

The *Curriculum for Wales Framework*²⁷ currently being rolled out across Wales (2022-2027) is determined nationally and includes both the curriculum requirements set out in legislation and a range of supporting, statutory guidance published under *Section 71 of the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act, 2021*²⁸. The guidance is a clear statement of what is important in delivering a broad and balanced education to pupils across Wales. It is intended that schools design their own curriculum built around the Framework's requirements and tailored by each school to be relevant and engaging to their pupils, according to the context of their lives. A set of co-constructed materials is available as a resource for schools to use and adapt as required. These have been developed in Wales, by practitioners for working with young people, and is a process led by expertise and which is evidence based.

The Framework falls broadly into 6 areas of learning and experience, Health and Wellbeing being one of these, with Healthy Relationships falling into this area. This topic includes consideration that learners '*need to recognise when relationships are unhealthy and need to be aware of how to keep safe and seek support for themselves and others.*'

There is no specific remit within this to include teaching and learning around grooming behaviours. This must be addressed urgently, safely and effectively, and should rely on existing expertise. The Reviewers have spoken to The Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse (CSA Centre)- the UK's national agency focused on improving understanding and response to child sexual abuse. The aim of the Centre is to reduce the impact of child sexual abuse through improved prevention and better response, and it sits at the cutting edge of research in this area, and the Centre would be well placed and able to support the development of such materials.

²⁷ <https://www.gov.wales/curriculum-wales-framework>

²⁸ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asc/2021/4/contents>

Improving Systems and Practice

In order to promote the learning from this case the Review identified the following actions for the Board and its member agencies and anticipated improvement outcomes:

Overview

All agencies must have regard to the sheer bravery required for a child to challenge a powerful abuser and be heard and believed.

The Recommendations of this Review have a relevance for all Schools, Local Authorities and Statutory Agencies working with children across Wales. Those organisations and agencies should reflect on and consider their practice in context of these findings.

Whilst the Review has reported its findings under thematic headings relating to the context of abuse in this school, the Recommendations set out below are cross-cutting and provide a framework for improvement which could be considered at national as well as local level.

The Recommendations are designed to be practical and achievable even though some may require changes to National guidance on safeguarding and school governance.

An overarching theme – listening to the Voice of the Child

This Review demonstrates that children's behaviour was not always viewed through a safeguarding lens by the professionals who worked with them, that they were not listened to when concerns were raised nor given a voice in the processes designed to keep them safe.

The Review recommends that

1. All organisations that work with children must ensure that their policies on listening to the voice of the child are reviewed, fully implemented and reflect the learning from this Review
2. Organisations must be able to evidence to their professional Board and Regulators that they have a mechanism for listening to children and that this is embedded and functioning
3. All agencies must ensure their staff are trained to identify and record behavioural changes in a child which may indicate that they are being groomed and/or abused

4. In schools these changes must be recorded on an electronic data management system
5. When a referral is made under Wales Safeguarding Procedures Section 5, all safeguarding information on the child's records on the data management system must be taken into consideration when assessing risk and vulnerability
6. When a referral is made under Wales Safeguarding Procedures Section 5 and is third party, the child who is subject of the referral must be spoken to by children's social care, even where they have not made a disclosure themselves
7. LA1 should consult with pupils to identify how best to provide access to an external individual or service, outside of school, to whom pupils can report concerns or worries. Contact details to be displayed prominently in all schools
8. Welsh Government develop the curriculum to ensure that pupils gain the knowledge to understand adult grooming behaviours and know how to report safely to an adult
9. All Local Authorities should evidence that they support and advocate for victims of trauma, on a case-by-case basis, where their access to education has been limited by their experience. This would include ensuring that victims have access to further and higher education and accompanying funds where grade requirements and attendance have not been met due to the trauma experienced

The management of allegations and concerns about adults who work with children - the multi-agency response

Section 5 arrangements

The *Wales Safeguarding Procedures 2019, Section 5*²⁹ are currently under review and out for consultation. The Welsh Government should ensure that the revision of Section 5 procedures is shaped by the learning from this Review and are stress-tested against this case.

The review has highlighted weaknesses in the system designed to safeguard children where there has been inconsistency in the application of

- threshold criteria for intervention,
- lack of a common understanding of 'suitability' to work with children and
- what is acceptable professional conduct of adults in a position of trust and power

This has left children at risk of abuse and harm.

The Review recommends that

²⁹ <https://www.safeguarding.wales/en/chi-i/chi-i-c5/>

10. The Welsh Government ensures that the revision of the Section 5 procedures is shaped by and takes account of the learning from this Review
11. The revised procedures make it a requirement that the voice of the child is heard, even where a child has not made a disclosure
12. It is a requirement that thresholds for invoking the procedures are decided at a multi-agency meeting and not solely by the LADO, and take into consideration previous concerns, complaints and allegations
13. Safeguarding Boards receive assurance that LADOs in their area have regular training and supervision
14. Safeguarding Boards require and scrutinise Local Authority reports on allegation management on at least an annual basis, and that reporting on allegations becomes part of the Estyn and CIW regulatory requirements.
15. Welsh Government consider requiring schools to develop an 'Adult Conduct of Concerns Policy' (known in England as a Low-level Concerns Policy') and consider producing guidance on safe working practice

Welsh Government will shortly publish its 10-year Strategy 2025 -2035 (consultation period ended October 2025) for the prevention of child sexual abuse (which builds on the National Action Plan for Preventing and Responding to CSA, July 2019). The Review identified systemic weaknesses which impacted on the effectiveness of inter-agency working to safeguard children.

The Review recommends that

16. The new Strategy is stress-tested against the findings of this review and that any learning is incorporated into the new strategy

The need for training - thinking the 'unthinkable' and understanding 'it could happen here'

The Review has highlighted that it simply did not occur to professional adults working with children that pupils were being sexually abused by the Headteacher at their school. There needs to be cultural shift in response to concerns about an individual working with children. The Review highlighted that in the established framework of safeguarding training there is limited focus on identifying abuse and the risk of harm from adults working in a position of trust in schools and other organisations. Foden was able to exploit gaps in the existing framework, relying on professionals' lack of understanding of the *modus operandi* of sex offenders and how they groom not only their victims but also the environment in which they work.

Professionals and volunteers working with children must be encouraged through training and professional development to '*think the unthinkable*' and to understand that '*it could happen here*'. Professionals must learn to approach concerns raised

through a culture and lens of ‘*what if I am right?*’ rather than ‘*what if I am wrong?*’ and understand the routes through which they can safely report their concerns to the Local Authority.

The Review recommends that

17. Welsh Government commission a training resource based on the findings of this Review for use by all schools in Wales. This should be adaptable for use by other agencies working with children
18. All school staff, volunteers (including administrative and facilities) and Governors receive training on the *modus operandi* of sex offenders and sex offender grooming using the Finklehor model
19. The safeguarding Boards are assured that this training is delivered to Local Authority personnel in Education, Children’s Services and Human Resources who lead on or respond to the management of concerns about adults working with children
20. The Safeguarding Board is assured that all Local Authorities have clear Whistleblowing policies which are publicised and can be used safely by all staff

The Governance of Schools in Wales

This Review has highlighted the weaknesses and inherent risks associated with the way in which schools are governed in Wales.

The Review recommends that

The Welsh Government initiates a review of the Governance arrangements in schools in Wales which

21. Clearly delineates Governor responsibilities to bring about a shift from a primary focus on financial management and results to one where safeguarding, health and wellbeing are seen as the proper foundation for learning and success
22. Supports the development and implementation of an easy-to-read dashboard of basic metrics to provide a measure of the wider health and culture of the school
23. Requires Governing Bodies to keep accurate records of decisions made regarding safeguarding matters which are reported to the Local Authority in particular where a decision has been made which does not follow Local Authority guidance
24. Ensures that Designated Safeguarding Persons and their deputies are subject to external supervision by qualified Social Workers from the relevant local authority

Restrictive Practices

The Review identified the excessive use of restrictive practices had become embedded in the culture of the school

The Review recommends that

25. The Welsh Government issues an addendum to the guidance on *Reducing Restrictive Practices Framework 2022* around the filming of incidents by adults, and on the appropriate retention of such filmed records

Crisis Management

Although rare, critical incidents of this nature require a strategic and coordinated response.

The Review has highlighted that in this case the School, Local Authority Children and Families Services and Education Services had neither single agency nor multi-agency coordinated plans in place to respond immediately to the critical incident in an effective, coordinated way.

The Review recommends that

26. Welsh Government is assured that all Local Authorities have in place a strategic critical incident plan which sets out the mechanism for an immediate and coordinated multi-agency response
 - a. The plan sets out arrangements for victim care, securing evidence and managing the alleged offender
 - b. The plan includes a formal protocol for information sharing with other Local Authorities which might be impacted
 - c. There is a strategic plan to locate accessible on-site support for both children and adults in organisations where there has been a significant traumatic incident
 - d. In a critical incident of this nature consideration is given to seconding a social worker to work with the police investigation team to ensure that evidence and information are viewed through a safeguarding as well as criminal lens

Recommendations for the Safeguarding Partners

The Review recommends that

27. Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board

- a. Considers the sharing of anonymised CAMHS data with Local Authorities to identify hotspots and thematic concerns
- b. Provide assurance to the Regional Safeguarding Children's Board that health professionals seek safeguarding advice when a child presents at an appointment accompanied by a third party without parental consent

Statement by Reviewer(s):

Statement of independence from the case Quality Assurance statement of qualification	Statement of independence from the case Quality Assurance statement of qualification
<p>I make the following statement that prior to my involvement with this learning review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I have not been directly concerned with the child or family or have given professional advice on the case.• I have had no immediate line management of the practitioner(s) involved.• I have the appropriate recognised qualifications, knowledge and experience and training to undertake the review.• The review was conducted appropriately and was rigorous in its analysis and evaluation of the issues as set out in the Terms of Reference.	<p>I make the following statement that prior to my involvement with this learning review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I have not been directly concerned with the child or family or have given professional advice on the case.• I have had no immediate line management of the practitioner(s) involved.• I have the appropriate recognised qualifications, knowledge and experience and training to undertake the review.• The review was conducted appropriately and was rigorous in its analysis and evaluation of the issues as set out in the Terms of Reference.

REVIEWER 1	REVIEWER 2
Name Jane Foster (Sarre)	Name Anna Henderson
Signature	Signature
	
Date 28.08.2025	Date 28.08.2025

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Chair of Review Panel

Name Jan Pickles OBE

Signature



Date 28.08.2025

Appendix 1: Terms of reference

Appendix 2: Summary timeline

- The process followed by the Board and the services represented on the Review Panel
- A learning event was held and the services that attended
- Victims/ survivors and the family members they have identified have been informed, their views sought and represented throughout the learning event and feedback had been provided to them.

For Welsh Government use only

Date information received Date acknowledgment letter sent to Board Chair Date circulated to relevant inspectorates/Policy Leads
.....

Agencies

CSSIW
Estyn
HIW
HMI Constabulary HMI Probation

Reason

Appendix 1: Glossary

ABE	Refers to a set of guidelines and practices laid out in the Ministry of Justice publication 'Achieving best evidence in criminal proceedings, 2022', aimed at gathering the most reliable and comprehensive information from vulnerable witnesses, especially children, in criminal investigations. The core principle is to conduct interviews in a way that minimizes the risk of contamination, ensures accuracy, and maximizes the witness's ability to recall and communicate details about an event.
ADHD	Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
ALN	Additional learning needs
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CCTV	Closed Circuit Television
CID16	CID16, also known as the Vulnerability Assessment Form, is a combined assessment and referral form used by law enforcement in North Wales when dealing with incidents involving vulnerable individuals, particularly in cases of domestic abuse. It is a structured document used to gather relevant information, assess risk, and guide officers in providing immediate safeguarding interventions.
CLA	Child Looked After- A child who is "looked after" means they are in the care of a local authority or are being provided with accommodation by a local authority.
Core SMT	Core, senior management team of the school
CSA	Child Sexual Assault
DBS	Disclosure and Barring Service
DDSP	Deputy Designated Safeguarding Person
DSP	Designated Safeguarding Person
EWC	Independent, professional regulator for the education workforce in Wales
HR	Human Resources
HS11	Local Authority form for recording detail of restraint incidents & submitting to the Education department (in LA1).
ICC	Independent Complaints Committee (Panel)
IDP	Individual Development Plan
KS3/4	Key stage 3 – school years 7-9; Key Stage 4 - years 10-11
LADO	Local Authority Designated Officer. This role is part of the child safeguarding process and focuses on managing allegations of misconduct against individuals who work

	with children. The LADO's main responsibility is to oversee allegations to ensure they are handled fairly and appropriately, safeguarding the child's welfare while also protecting the rights of the individual accused.
LEA	Local Education Authority
MAPA	Management of Actual or Potential Aggression, a training program focused on equipping individuals with the skills to handle and de-escalate potentially aggressive or violent situations
MASH	Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, meetings are collaborative discussions involving various agencies to assess and address risks to vulnerable individuals, particularly children.
NEU	National Education Union
NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
NWSCB/ NWSB	North Wales Safeguarding (Children's) Board
Other SMT	Non-core SMT staff/Assistant Heads with supplementary responsibilities within the school
NWP	North Wales Police
Part 4 AWCPP (2008)	Part 4 of the All Wales Child Protection Procedures (AWCPP) 2008 focused on safeguarding allegations and concerns about practitioners and <u>has since been replaced by new national guidance (see Section 5)</u> .
PoT	A position of trust refers to a role where an individual has direct contact with, and the ability to exercise authority or control over, children or vulnerable adults. These roles often involve caring, educating, or providing support and are frequently found in settings like social care, healthcare, education, and the justice system. Abuse of a position of trust is a serious offence, particularly when involving sexual activity with a minor, even if the minor is above the age of consent.
PSO	Police (School/ Community) Liaison Officer
SARC	Sexual Assault Referral Centre provides confidential, specialist support to anyone who has been raped, sexually assaulted, or abused.
SCB	Safeguarding Children's Board
Section 3 Strategy Discussion	A Section 3 Strategy Discussion falls within the All Wales Child Protection Procedures framework and is a meeting convened by social services following a report of potential significant harm to a child, intended to ensure that information is shared, to facilitate a decision on the next steps, and determine if a Section 47 enquiry (investigation) is needed to assess the child's safety.

Section 5	The Section 5 process of the <u>new</u> , 2020 All Wales Child Protection Procedures (AWCPP) addresses safeguarding allegations or concerns about practitioners and those in positions of trust (replaced earlier guidance- see Part 4).
Section 5 Professional Strategy Discussion/ Meeting	<p>A Section 5 Strategy Discussion is a process within the Wales Safeguarding Procedures that addresses concerns about practitioners and individuals in positions of trust who may be abusing or risking the harm of children or adults. This discussion involves key agencies, primarily the Police and Social Services, to assess information, determine the necessary actions, and decide on appropriate steps to protect the vulnerable, including informing the subject of the allegation and their representatives. The discussion also focuses on protecting other individuals who may be at risk and agreeing on how to share information about the process.</p> <p>A Professional Strategy Meeting is convened after an initial Professional Strategy Discussion has established that there are concerns about a practitioner or someone in a position of trust who works with children or adults at risk. This meeting aims to coordinate child, adult, and criminal procedures, share information, decide on protective actions, and plan any necessary investigations fairly and efficiently to safeguard vulnerable individuals.</p>
Section 47	Section 47 (s. 47) of the Children Act 1989 is a legal provision requiring local authorities to investigate if a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm. These investigations, known as Section 47 enquiries or Child Protection Enquiries, involve a single or more usually a multi-agency assessment by social services, police, and other bodies to determine what action is needed to safeguard the child's welfare. The process involves gathering information, assessing the risks, and potentially leading to family support, Child Protection Conferences or care proceedings.
SEN	Special educational needs
SMT	Senior Management Team
Suitability to work with Children	In the context of child protection refers to the assessment of an individual's fitness and capacity to work with children, ensuring they can create a safe and nurturing environment and uphold their safeguarding responsibilities. This assessment involves various checks and considerations to determine if the individual poses a risk to children's well-being.
ToR	Terms of Reference
WJEC	Welsh Joint Education Committee

Appendix 2: A reflection on the Clywch Inquiry Report recommendations

A theme of this Child Practice Review has been that recommendations in regard to Foden's interactions with pupils were either not followed, or where Foden was given words of advice or instruction his subsequent behaviours and adherence to the matters raised with him was not monitored.

Recommendations from the current Review have been compared with those of the Clywch Report published by Welsh Government in 2004, some twenty years ago. Whilst it is unlikely that, even had all of the Clywch recommendations been put in place at the time, this alone would have prevented Foden from offending. However, it may have made it more difficult for him to offend in plain sight and to get away with it.

This Review has considered carefully the recommendations contained in the Clywch Report and notes those of the Joint inspectorates' Review of Inter-agency Arrangements and Practice to Safeguard and Protect Children in Pembrokeshire (2011) and Southbank International School Serious Case Review (England 2014).

It is appalling that the Recommendations of this current Review reflect those of Clywch in particular, so closely, and that 20 years later key issues have still not been resolved or acted upon. It is imperative that the recommendations from this Review are fully embraced and delivered in an effective and timely way.

Clywch and the themed Recommendations in this Review

Extracted recommendations from the Clywch report are set out below under thematic headings and can be used as comparators for the recommendations emanating from this Review. Each extract begins with the paragraph reference from the published Clywch Report.

An Overarching Theme: Listening to the Voice of the Child:

In 2004 the Clywch Report recommended

9.18

I recommend that in any child protection investigation the wishes and views of the child about the conduct of the interview, including their wishes about the nature of the support they prefer, are always sensitively ascertained and recorded and form part of the interview planning process and that the All Wales Child Protection Procedures are amended accordingly within 12 months of the publication of this report.

21.2

I recommend that consideration always be given by the police to informing a

child of the outcome of a police investigation, taking great care to explain what has happened and that the All Wales Child Protection Procedures are amended accordingly, within 12 months of the publication of this report.

Theme 3: Reporting Concerns, Managing Allegations, Making referrals. Systems and Processes

In 2004 the Clywch Report recommended

21.7 – updating guidance

I recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government issue guidance within 12 months of the publication of this report on how allegations of child abuse made against teaching and non-teaching staff should be investigated. The guidance should consider the:

- (i) Joint NEOST /Teacher Union guidance on Education Staff and Child Protection: Staff Facing an Allegation of Abuse
- (ii) Practice Guide to Investigating Allegations of Abuse against a Professional or Carer in Relation to Looked After Children
- (iii) All Wales ACPC Child Protection Procedures.
- (iv) National Assembly for Wales Guidance 'Working Together to Safeguard Children'.

21.19 – review of procedures and specialist input

I recommend that the chairs of all ACPCs in Wales review existing procedures relating to Allegations Against Professionals to establish clear responses when dealing with such allegations within 6 months of publication of this report.

Policies, procedures and practice should be unambiguous, realistic and should not conflict with local or national agency procedures.

I recommend that the chairs of all ACPCs in Wales review existing procedures

21.8 – where an investigation is commenced, it should be undertaken by a specialist personnel officer of the local authority who should also present the case unless a solicitor or counsel is instructed

21.9 – inter-agency working

I recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government establish a task group within 6 months of the publication of this report, with representatives from all interested parties, charged with bringing forward a set of proposals to implement the recommendation I have made in respect of schools' disciplinary tribunals. The interested parties should include:

- (ii) governor representatives
- (iii) local education authority officials
- (iv) child protection and legal experts
- (v) children and young people
- (vi) General Teaching Council representatives
- (vii) Welsh Local Government Association

(viii) police.

Matters to be considered by the task group to include the threshold for referrals, appeals, tribunal rules, the interrelationship with police investigations and the recording of investigations on the files of teaching and non-teaching staff.

21.24 – record retention

I recommend that ACPC chairs ensure that the All Wales Child Protection Procedures are amended within 6 months of the publication of this report to give guidance on the retention and storage of documents which would allow for cases to be reviewed as appropriate over a long period.

Theme 3: Inter-Agency Working

Inter-agency working has changed dramatically over last 20 years and was not a specific theme in Clywch. However, the recommendations in Clywch that were directed at WJEC still have wider relevance, and at the time were cutting-edge.

Although guidance in the Wales Safeguarding Procedures for Children and Adults at risk of Abuse and Neglect, has now moved on from the position where it was assumed that agencies would work together to one where this is set out as a duty, it is evident from this Review that this still is not embedded consistently.

21.11 - referrals, roles and procedures

The policy and procedures should include reference to the following:

- (i) the National Assembly for Wales Guidance 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' and to the All Wales Child Protection Procedures
- (ii) referral to social services and the police
- (iii) sharing information
- (iv) recording and storage of information of child protection concerns
- (v) the need for and remit of a designated child protection coordinator role
- (vi) child protection training
- (vii) interrelationship between child protection investigations and disciplinary procedures
- (viii) monitoring and review of arrangements

Theme 5 Governance and complaints/ whistleblowing

In 2004 Clywch recommended

21.5 - governors

I recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government issues guidance within 6 months of the publication of this report which requires the governors of all schools, whether they be community, voluntary aided, voluntary controlled, foundation or independent schools and further education colleges to have a whistleblowing policy in place and that all teachers and non-teaching staff are

informed as to its operation.

21.6 - whistleblowing

I recommend that, on appointment in any school or further education college in Wales, every teacher and member or non-teaching staff should receive written and oral instruction on whistleblowing procedures and how to operate them.

This should then be reinforced on a regular basis.

21.22 (iii) Governor training

[I recommend that] all Chief Executives and Directors of Education in Wales ... carry out an audit of all schools to identify the nominated governor for child protection. Once this information is established, a programme should be put in place to ensure that nominated governors have the opportunity to attend child protection training to include training in dealing with allegations against teaching and non-teaching staff. In addition, an opportunity to attend child protection training should be made available to all governors.

21.25 - complaints

I recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government's 'Guidance on Procedures for Dealing With Complaints to Governing Bodies' be amended to include clear and unambiguous guidance on the responsibilities of relevant parties if complaints raise child protection concerns.

21.26 – complaints procedures

I recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government's 'Guidance on Procedures for Dealing With Complaints to Governing Bodies' is amended to make it clear that the Children's Commissioner for Wales has powers, under the Care Standards Act 2000 and the Children's Commissioner for Wales Act 2001, to review complaints procedures in schools and to review individual cases.

21.27 – complaints involving pupils

The Welsh Assembly Government's 'Guidance on Procedures for Dealing with Complaints to Governing Bodies' shows an awareness of the difficulties in achieving sufficient independence in all stages of the investigative process of a complaint and in adjudication in schools,.....Nonetheless, I feel the arrangements proposed should, amended as I have suggested, be given the chance to be tested and therefore that they, together with 'Complaints Involving Pupils' should be issued as statutory guidance without delay

21.30 – advocacy for children

I recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government, within 3 months of the publication of this report, require all school governing bodies to ensure that children are informed in their school of the availability and purpose of relevant services, including ChildLine, the NSPCC Child Protection Helpline, social services, the Children's Commissioner for Wales and advocacy services

Theme 7: Training and Curriculum

In 2004 Clywch recommended

21.3 - teacher training re offenders

I recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government and the General Teaching Council for Wales and the DfES take steps to ensure that teachers receive specialist input in their professional qualifying training programme about the way in which abusers operate and that the findings of this report form part of that training, this recommendation to be implemented within 2 years of the publication of this report.

21.4 – local authority child protection training

I recommend that local education authorities and Area Child Protection Committees consider how induction, in-house and refresher training in child protection can be provided on a regular basis.

21.31 - curriculum

I recommend that ACCAC [former curriculum assessment body] within 12 months of the publication of this report review its Personal and Social Education Framework in light of my report and decide whether changes or additions need to be made.

21.22 – training and record keeping

I recommend that all Chief Executives and Directors of Education in Wales or their equivalents within 3 months of the publication of this report:

- (i) establish and maintain an authority wide database relating to all schools, stating the name of the designated liaison teacher for child protection, the level of training undertaken and the dates on which training was given
- (ii) develop and implement an action plan to ensure that all staff employed within education and Children's Services who are in direct contact with children and young people and those personnel with a policy/management role in relation to schools and the education service, are trained in child protection as appropriate to their duties

21.23 – pastoral care skills and support for children

I recommend that all Chief Executives and Directors of Education in Wales or their equivalents appoint a child protection coordinator within 6 months of the publication of this report with a specific responsibility for schools, to increase the capacity of local authorities to support and develop school related child protection issues, and young people in education including provision of appropriate support to children during disciplinary, child protection, complaints and exclusion processes within 12 months of the publication of this report.

This national strategy should also consider teachers' pastoral care skills, training and support and the respective roles within pastoral care of teaching staff, counsellors and educational welfare staff.

<https://safeguarding.wales/en/int-i/int-i-i1/i1-p1/>

<https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Clywch.pdf>

<https://www.gov.wales/docs/cssiw/report/110811pemben.pdf>

<https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/pdf/Southbank%20SCR%20REPORT%2012%201%2016.pdf>

Agenda Item 7

MEETING:	GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE
DATE:	15 JANUARY 2026
TITLE:	REVENUE BUDGET 2025/26 – END OF NOVEMBER 2025 REVIEW
PURPOSE:	Monitoring Report on the Latest Financial Position
ACTION:	Receive the information, consider the risks arising from the forecast expenditure against the budget, and scrutinise the decisions to be presented to Cabinet regarding budget management by the Council and its departments
CABINET MEMBER:	COUNCILLOR HUW WYN JONES
CONTACT OFFICER:	FFION MADOG EVANS, ASSISTANT HEAD OF FINANCE

1. In accordance with the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, the Governance and Audit Committee is expected to scrutinise some financial matters, including budget monitoring reports, as appropriate.
2. The attached report (Revenue Budget 2025/26 – End of November 2025 Review) will be submitted to the Cabinet on 20 January 2026.
3. The Cabinet Member for Finance and the Chairman of the Governance and Audit Committee have asked us to present this report to the Governance and Audit Committee to be scrutinised.
4. The Governance and Audit Committee is requested to note the situation and the relevant risks regarding the budgets of the Council and its departments, consider the decisions for the Cabinet and comment as necessary.

Appendices:

Cabinet report 20/01/2026: Revenue Budget 2025/26 – End of November 2025 Review

CYNGOR GWYNEDD - Report to Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet

Title of Item:	Revenue Budget 2025/26 – End of November 2025 Review
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Huw Wyn Jones, Cabinet Member - Finance
Relevant officer:	Ffion Madog Evans, Assistant Head of Finance Department - Accountancy and Pensions
Date of meeting:	20 January 2026

Summary

- *Six council departments are overspending, with ongoing overspending in the areas of home care and residential care, out-of-county children's placements, Derwen service, post-16 and waste.*
- *Increase in the projected overspend for council departments, with forecasts showing departments overspending by £6.5 million by the end of the financial year in the November Review, compared with projections of £6.3 million at the end of August.*
- *The council's overall financial position has improved since the August Review, which had forecast a budget shortfall of £2.5 million, but this has reduced to a £2.3 million shortfall in the November Review.*
- *Receipt of a grant from the Welsh Government, a reduction in general capital costs, and a favourable position on a number of corporate budgets are helping to alleviate the overall financial situation for the Council.*

1. Decision sought

That the Cabinet:

- 1.1** Approve additional financial support above the contractual payment to Cwmni Byw'n Iach to be funded from the transformation fund, delegating the right to the Cabinet Member for Economy in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, the Chief Executive and the Head of Finance to agree on the amount of the final financial support above the contractual payment with Byw'n Iach at the end of the financial year. Based on the current review, it is estimated that the value of the support will be £295k.
- 1.2** Approve a transfer of £3.365 million of underspend on corporate budgets to the Council's Financial Strategy Support Fund, to be used at the end of the financial year to fund the overspend faced by the departments.
- 1.3** Approve the financial virements as outlined in **Appendix 3** following a review of the 2024/25 Council Tax Premium, with a transfer of £2.089 million from the Financial Strategy Support Fund to the Council Tax Premium Fund.

2. The reason why the Cabinet needs to make the decision

2.1 The purpose of this report seeks to provide a trajectory of the revenue position by the end of the financial year. Therefore, the amounts noted below is an estimate of what we are projecting by March 2026, and they are not amounts that represent the current overspend position.

2.2 It is the Cabinet's responsibility to take action, as necessary, to secure appropriate control over the Council's budgets (e.g. approval of significant virements or supplementary budgets).

3. Introduction and Rationale

Background / Introduction

3.1 This report presents the end of November review of the Council's revenue budget for 2025/26, and a summary of the situation per Department is outlined in **Appendix 1**. The current projections suggest that six of the departments will have budget deficits by the end of the year. The main deficit is anticipated in:

- Adults, Health and Well-being Department - Residential Homes and Domiciliary Care
- Children and Supporting Families Department – out-of-county placements, Derwen and Post-16
- Environment Department - Waste
- Highways, Engineering and YGC Department - highways and municipal
- Housing and Property Department - Homelessness

3.2 Below, and in **Appendix 2**, further details are provided relating to the main issues and headings where a budget deficit is projected, as well as specific recommendations, where appropriate.

4. Rationale and justification for recommending the decision

The Savings Situation

4.1 In the 2025/26 Budget report to the Full Council on 6 March 2025, it was reported that £3.5 million worth of savings were profiled for the 2025/26 budget. The budgets have been reduced by this amount; therefore, the situation is reported upon after considering the savings.

4.2 In recent years, we have reported on risks in achieving savings. In terms of the remaining schemes, there are risks to the delivery of some of the schemes.

4.3 The latest situation in terms of savings is that almost £47 million, namely 93% of the amended savings schemes since 2015, have now been realised.

5. Council Departments

5.1 Adults, Health and Well-being Department

There is a mixed situation for the 2025/26 budget, with over £3 million in additional permanent funding allocated to the Department, whilst the budget at the same time was reduced by cuts of over £1m this year, as well as £500k of historical savings removed from the budget but not realised to date (total savings of £1.5m). Latest projections suggest that if there are no changes in the actions during the year, there will be a financial deficit of £3.06m by the end of the financial year.

The demand for residential care services increased, with 46 additional residents in private homes, partly due to staffing challenges at the Council's in-house residential homes, which has led to a reduction in the beds available, leading to substantial cost increases. There has been an unexpected and unusual increase in the number (14 since November 2024), of individuals requiring residential care due to mental health issues, and this adds to the demand.

The domiciliary care provision is costing more than the budget, and this shows the additional cost of the effort made to provide care in areas where a service is not readily available. The in-house domiciliary care service saw additional costs due to an increase in sickness rates. The Department is committed to reduce these costs, and the subsequent overspend, during this year.

5.2 Children and Supporting Families Department

An increase was seen in the Department's budget for 2025/26 of £2.175 million. There has been an increase in the number of individuals needing specialist care outside the county and that care is costly. There has been an increase in the provision of care for children with disabilities in the county through the services of Derwen and Hafan y Sêr. It is anticipated that there will be a budget deficit of around £1.8 million by the end of the financial year if there is no change in what is provided during the year.

5.3 Education Department

An underspend of (£15k) is forecast by the Education Department. Following substantial overspend on school transport over the last few years, the field received an additional budget allocation of £896k on a permanent basis and a further £939k for the year only, to address the pressures in the field of school buses and taxis. There has been an

improvement in the field of transport and, therefore, it is possible to reduce the one-off contribution to £587k based on the latest projections.

5.4 Byw'n Iach

Over the past few years, Cwmni Byw'n Iach has received financial support from the Council above the contractual payment in the delivery contract, which was £550k in 2022/23, £308k in 2023/24 and £281k in 2024/25, to enable them to maintain their services. It is projected that the demand for financial support will continue in 2025/26 with the required amount being £295k by the end of the year.

5.5 Highways, Engineering and YGC Department

A budget deficit of £492k is anticipated by the Department by the end of the year. A reduction was seen in the work being commissioned by external agencies which is having a negative impact on the income of the highways services. The department is prudent when attempting to project the spending arising when responding to storms and inclement weather. Spending on the inclement weather response is a part of the Department's annual operations, and despite the efforts made to cope with the spending by means of programmed work, over the last 3 years, the associated costs have been above the budget. In the Municipal service, there is a combination of factors, including additional pressure on the staff budgets of street cleaning and cleaning public toilets. While income losses are issues for land maintenance and public toilets. Savings not realised contribute to the overspend position.

5.6 The Environment Department

A budget deficit of around £685K is forecast by the end of the year, with the annual trend of overspending in the waste field continuing and is responsible for £617k of the departmental overspend. The Department has many plans in progress to address this overspending. At one time, the overspend was £1.4m, therefore, a lot has been achieved over the past two years. In order to achieve the last step over the next year, there will be a need to complete a restructure of the waste Service, followed by further operational changes. Savings not realised contribute to the department's overspend position.

£3.7m of new income was received which derives from a levy on packaging for producers and retailers, to promote recycling by the companies who create this waste. For this year, we will need to use the first proportion of this income to address any deficit in the waste service's revenue budget before transferring the rest to a fund for the time being.

On 16 December 2025, the Cabinet approved funding of £1.5 million from the Financial Strategy Support Fund to fund the costs stemming from securing and demolishing the Corbett Arms Hotel building in Tywyn. The Grade II listed building has been causing concern to Cyngor Gwynedd and the local community for years as it is in a structurally dangerous condition, which has meant that the Council has had to act to protect and safeguard the public.

5.7 Housing and Property Department

The trend of significant pressure on the emergency accommodation service continues, with expenditure in the field forecast to be £6.6 million this year, compared to £6 million last year. The reported financial situation takes into account an additional budget of £3m allocated from the council tax premium and also a one-off additional budget of £859k allocated as part of the bids procedure to assist with the increasing pressures. It is anticipated that the department as a whole will overspend by £248k, which is a combination of higher costs for moving and storing the personal property of households who receive emergency accommodation, and prices per night for emergency accommodation continue to be high with some providers.

5.8 Corporate

An underspend of £4.2 million on corporate headings as a result of added tax yield and prudent projections when setting the 2025/26 budget. A reduction in overall capital costs following the repayment of a historical loan and as there was no need for external borrowing. The situation is also favourable following the receipt of an additional grant from the Welsh Government towards public sector wage costs, higher interest projections as well as the release of bid funds.

5.9 Funds

Appendix 3 outlines a review of funds. Following the end of the 2024/25 financial year, a review was carried out of council tax income and the premium deriving from the tax on second homes and empty properties for 2024/25. The result is that £2.089 million relevant to Council Tax Premium is to be transferred from the Financial Strategy Support Fund to the Council Tax Premium Fund. £1.761 million of this amount is inflation-related and £328k for the remainder which applies to the 2024/25 Premium.

6. Conclusion

6.1 A spending position of £2.3 million more than the budget is projected in order to continue to meet the increasing demand for services for the rest of the year, based on the information that we currently have. The figure is based on a £6.5 million budget deficit by the departments, with the impact mitigated by a likely £4.2 million underspend on corporate budgets, of which £3.4 million is available to assist with the financial position of the rest of the council.

7. Next steps and timetable

7.1 A report outlining the situation at the end of the financial year will be presented to Cabinet in May 2026.

8. Observations of the Statutory Officers

8.1 Chief Finance Officer

I have worked with the Cabinet Member to prepare this report and I confirm the content.

8.2 Monitoring Officer

No comments to add in terms of propriety.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Summary of departmental budgets' net positions

Appendix 2 - Details of budgets and the significant variances

Appendix 3 - Review of Funds

Revenue Budget 2025/26 - Summary of the position per Department

	End of November Review				
	2025/26 Proposed Budget £'000	Gross Estimated Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26 £'000	Recommended Adjustments £'000	Estimated Adjusted Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26 £'000	
Adults, Health and Well-being	84,292	3,062	0	3,062	3,133
Children and Families	26,554	1,856	0	1,856	1,561
Business Service and Care Commissioning	3,163	(144)	0	(144)	(93)
Education	125,369	(15)	0	(15)	(20)
Economy and Community	6,449	346	(295)	51	77
Highways, Engineering and YGC	19,096	492	0	492	522
Environment	18,980	685	0	685	740
Housing and Property	12,400	248	0	248	167
Corporate Management Team and Legal	2,950	(14)	0	(14)	(21)
Corporate Support	8,513	(6)	0	(6)	(6)
Finance (and Information Technology)	9,346	(13)	0	(13)	(8)
Corporate Budgets (Differences only)	*	(4,236)	3,365	(871)	0
Totals (net)	326,458	2,261	3,070	5,331	6,052

REVENUE BUDGET 2025/26- END OF NOVEMBER REVIEW

Adults, Health and Well-being Department	2025/26 Proposed Budget	2025/26 Estimated Position	Estimated Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26	Use of Other Sources or Other Adjustments Recommended	Estimated Adjusted Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26	Estimated August Review Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26
Area:-	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
<u>Adults Services</u>						
Management	598	563	(35)		(35)	(62)
Learning Disabilities Services	31,281	31,480	199		199	189
Mental Health Services	6,076	6,683	607		607	560
Older People's Services						
Residential and Nursing - Homes	24,516	25,456	940		940	912
Domiciliary Care	11,700	12,974	1,274		1,274	1,558
Physical Disabilities Services	3,653	2,583	(1,070)		(1,070)	(1,072)
Direct Payments	2,194	2,122	(72)		(72)	(183)
Others	3,058	3,267	209		209	90
	45,121	46,402	1,281	0	1,281	1,305
Adults Services Total	83,076	85,128	2,052	0	2,052	1,992
<u>Provider Services (shows net budget)</u>						
Residential Care	68	979	911		911	1,047
Community Care	1,147	1,240	93		93	104
Others	1	7	6		6	(10)
Provider Services Total	1,216	2,226	1,010	0	1,010	1,141
Adults, Health and Well-being Total	84,292	87,354	3,062	0	3,062	3,133

Adults, Health and Well-being

Over £3.1 million in additional permanent funding was allocated to the Department for the 2025/26 budget onwards. The latest projections suggest that if no operational changes are made during this year, then the budget deficit will be £3.06m by the end of the financial year.

Department Management - staff turnover and underspend on the legal budget, one-off costs reducing the underspend reported.

Learning Disability - the service received an additional budget allocation of £400k in 2025/26, the new savings schemes to the value of £735k are not being realised and therefore lead to an overspend. There is pressure on day services, support plans and on the residential service at the Council's homes. The work of reviewing care packages continues and is bearing fruit.

Mental Health - £177k of additional funding has been allocated to this field for 2025/26, a budget deficit of £731k is projected for the residential and nursing element following an unexpected and unusual increase in the numbers, with 11 new cases during this financial year (14 since November 2024). The support plans and supported accommodation are underspending and so reduce the overspend reported.

Older People - £1.5 million in additional permanent funding was allocated to the Department for 2025/26, with £1.2 million of it allocated to Domiciliary Care. Nevertheless, an overspend of £1.3 million is projected by the end of the year. In residential and nursing, the demand for residential services increased, with 46 additional residents in private homes, partly due to staffing challenges at in-house residential homes, which has led to a reduction in the beds available, leading to substantial cost increases. In Domiciliary Care, the costs are £1.3 million above the budget as a result of the additional costs of the efforts to provide domiciliary care in areas where a service is not readily available. In the physical disabilities field, the reduced demand for domiciliary care continues. In 'Others', increasing pressures and savings schemes are yet to be realised.

Provider Services - staff overspend in residential care including £606k of an overspend on the use of agency staff. An additional budget of £1 million has been permanently invested in domiciliary care in 2025/26 and therefore there is a reduction in the overspend reported this year; nevertheless, staff costs are above the budget, with high levels of sickness and rates of non-contact hours.

Savings - in terms of the situation of realising savings for the department, although progress has been seen in realising savings, savings to the value of £1.5 million are yet to be realised.

REVENUE BUDGET 2025/26- END OF NOVEMBER REVIEW

Children and Families Department	2025/26 Proposed Budget	2025/26 Estimated Position	Estimated Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26	Use of Other Sources or Other Adjustments Recommended	Estimated Adjusted Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26	Estimated August Review Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26
Area:-	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Management	708	797	89		89	117
Operational	3,076	3,427	351		351	375
Placements						
Out-of-County Placements	6,984	7,667	683		683	409
Small Group Homes	142	171	29		29	12
Fostering through an Agency	1,755	1,484	(271)		(271)	(232)
Fostering - Internal	3,119	3,244	125		125	18
Support Services and Others	2,212	2,403	191		191	218
	14,212	14,969	757	0	757	425
Post-16	1,779	1,983	204		204	229
Derwen Service	3,662	4,195	533		533	515
Youth Justice	276	271	(5)		(5)	(5)
Early Years	158	(16)	(174)		(174)	(171)
Workforce Development Unit	312	312	0		0	0
Others	2,371	2,472	101		101	76
Children and Families Total	26,554	28,410	1,856	0	1,856	1,561

Children and Families

£2.175 million of additional permanent funding was allocated to the Department for the 2025/26 budget. Nevertheless, it is projected that the department's budgetary deficit will be £1.86 million by the end of the financial year.

Management - one-off additional staffing costs.

Operational - although a permanent additional resource to the value of £365k has been allocated to the field for 2025/26 onwards, the overspend trend continues as a result of substantial pressure on support plan support as well as field worker staffing above the budget.

Placements - although an increase has been seen in the average number of out-of-county placements again this year to 36.6 (34.3 in 2024/25, 32.5 in 2023/24, 25.7 in 2022/23), four exceptional cases in non-registered placements have already ended this year, with a further two which will have come to an end by the end of the financial year. Seven new placements were seen since the beginning of the year. £216k is the average cost of the placements.

The average numbers of Agency Fostering and In-house Fostering are consistent with the numbers for 2024/25, with only four in-house fostering cases since the last review. It was seen that the income from the Home Office has reduced for unaccompanied asylum seekers (without parents/guardians) who are receiving a service. In the support service and others, there is increasing pressure on the budget of the support workers and on the North Wales Adoption Service.

Small Group Homes - the homes are currently being established in Gwynedd with one home now operational, and the second by the end of the financial year and the third next year. This in-house provision means that children can be placed in-house instead of with out-of-county external providers. The Council received grants to establish the homes as well as a contribution towards the costs of running the homes this year.

Post-16 - additional pressures on the service including the over 18s asylum seeker element as the Home Office's contribution is not sufficient to cover the costs. Staffing above the social worker budget also contributes to the overspending.

Derwen - to respond to the overspending trend, Derwen received an additional permanent resource allocation of £1 million for the 2025/26 budget. Nevertheless, the projected overspend is £533k, with pressures on support plan workers and specialist support.

Early Years - staff turnover and increasing grants available to fund the core spending led to an underspend.

Others - many factors including one-off additional costs, overspending on specialist services fees and on the out-of-hours service.

REVENUE BUDGET 2025/26- END OF NOVEMBER REVIEW

Business and Care Commissioning Service	2025/26 Proposed Budget	2025/26 Estimated Position	Estimated Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26	Use of Other Sources or Other Adjustments Recommended	Estimated Adjusted Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26	Estimated August Review Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26
Area:-	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Support and Commissioning	1,328	1,246	(82)		(82)	0
Income and Finance	1,556	1,518	(38)		(38)	(64)
Preventative Services	279	255	(24)		(24)	(29)
Business and Care Commissioning Service Total	3,163	3,019	(144)	0	(144)	(93)

Business and Care Commissioning Service

Support and Commissioning - saving as a result of a joint decision on a north Wales level to reduce the contribution level to the Regional Partnership Board. In addition, the use of various grants against costs and therefore improve the financial projections.

Income and Finance - underspend on staff costs and as a result of a grant receipt towards staff time associated with the work to implement care case software across north Wales. For a period, two care information systems will run concurrently.

Preventative Service - receipt of an additional grant for preventive services which means there is an underspend at the end of the financial year.

REVENUE BUDGET 2025/26- END OF NOVEMBER REVIEW

Education Department	2025/26 Proposed Budget	2025/26 Estimated Position	Estimated Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26	Use of Other Sources or Other Adjustments Recommended	Estimated Adjusted Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26	Estimated August Review Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26
Area:-	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Leadership and Management	2,524	2,578	54		54	48
Devolved Schools	105,240	105,240	0		0	0
Gwasanaethau Ansawdd Ysgolion	(2,237)	(2,283)	(46)		(46)	(21)
Infrastructure and Support Services						
Transportation	8,328	8,328	0		0	0
Ancillary Services	1,108	1,035	(73)		(73)	(87)
Others	3,906	3,974	68		68	60
	13,342	13,337	(5)	0	(5)	(27)
Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion	5,487	5,471	(16)		(16)	(28)
Youth Service	1,013	1,011	(2)		(2)	8
Education Total	125,369	125,354	(15)	0	(15)	(20)

Education

Leadership and Management - one-off spend on implementing a new information management system for schools and consultant fees.

Schools Quality Service - transitional period for the new service with vacant posts, income receipts and additional grants, but there is substantial pressure on the immersion system budget.

Transport - following substantial overspending in the field over the past years, a budget of £896k was allocated on a permanent basis and a further £939k for the year only to address the pressures in the field of school buses and taxis. Based on the latest projections, the one-off contribution can be cut to £587k, therefore we report on a balanced financial position.

The transport field continues to be the subject of a strategic review to try to control the increase in the expenditure, so that it is possible to reduce overspending and take advantage of opportunities for efficiencies.

Infrastructure and Support Services - Ancillary Service - projection of a higher income and lower costs for catering after receiving a grant receipt for primary school free school meals. Overspend on staff costs due to sickness are issues in school cleaning and caretaking. The care element of the breakfast clubs also continues to overspend by £97k as a result of higher staff costs and a lack of income.

Infrastructure and Support Services - Others - one-off costs being reduced by underspending on other budgets.

Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion - a mixed picture which is a combination of staff turnover and grant receipts but there is pressure on other various headings. The circumstances relating to one specific centre has ended and is responsible for an overspend of £50k.

REVENUE BUDGET 2025/26- END OF NOVEMBER REVIEW

Economy and Community Department	2025/26 Proposed Budget	2025/26 Estimated Position	Estimated Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26	Use of Other Sources or Other Adjustments Recommended	Estimated Adjusted Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26	Estimated August Review Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26
Area:-	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Management	410	407	(3)		(3)	(4)
Community Regeneration and Support Programmes	653	651	(2)		(2)	0
Maritime and Country Parks	(128)	(93)	35		35	26
Byw'n Iach and Other Leisure Contracts	2,293	2,679	386	(295)	91	114
Economic Development Programmes	(63)	(63)	0		0	0
Marketing and Events	269	269	0		0	0
Gwynedd Libraries	1,864	1,829	(35)		(35)	(25)
Gwynedd Museums, Arts and Archives	1,102	1,116	14		14	15
Use of the Department's Underspend Fund	49	0	(49)		(49)	(49)
Economy and Community Total	6,449	6,795	346	(295)	51	77

Economy and Community

Management - grant receipt leading to an underspend on the core budget.

Maritime and Country Parks - a mixed picture which includes spending above the budget of £63k in Doc Fictoria, Caernarfon, income deficit of £58k from Beaches and a one-off spend on Parc Padarn whilst Parc Glynllifon underspends (£25k) as a result of exceeding income and less spending on several headings. Better income projections and staff underspend meaning that Hafan, Pwllheli is underspending (£76k).

Byw'n Iach and Other Leisure Contracts - transfer of the leisure provision to Byw'n Iach in April 2019, but the responsibility for the property running costs remain with the Council. Over the past few years, the company has received annual financial support from the Council which was £550k in 2022/23 and £308k in 2023/24, and £281k in 2024/25, which was above the contractual payment in the delivery contract, to enable them to maintain their services. It is projected that the demand for financial support continues this year, and the required amount is £295k by the end of the year.

Furthermore, an overspend of £91k on the Economy and Community Department budget to run leisure facilities.

Gwynedd Libraries - following a transitional period of restructuring the service, every post has now been filled. Income receipts are higher as banks make regular use of space in Caernarfon Library.

Gwynedd Museums, Arts and Archives - overspending mainly because staffing costs exceed the budget and lack of income is an issue in Storiel £12k and Lloyd George Museum £12k. Less spending on several budget headings in other museums reduced the overspend.

It is recommended that the Cabinet approves additional financial support for Byw'n Iach if the overspend continues at the end of the financial year, with the existing projections estimating support to the value of £295k.

REVENUE BUDGET 2025/26- END OF NOVEMBER REVIEW

Highways, Engineering and YGC Department (including Trunk roads)	2025/26 Proposed Budget	2025/26 Estimated Position	Estimated Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26	Use of Other Sources or Other Adjustments Recommended	Estimated Adjusted Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26	Estimated August Review Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26
Area:-	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Services:						
Highways (including Trunk roads)	12,255	12,475	220		220	188
Engineering	488	460	(28)		(28)	(31)
Municipal	6,149	6,530	381		381	445
Gwynedd Consultancy	204	123	(81)		(81)	(80)
Highways, Engineering and YGC Total	19,096	19,588	492	0	492	522

Highways, Engineering and YGC (including Trunk roads)

Highways Services - although an increase was seen in realising savings in this area, savings to the value of £250k remain to be achieved in the County Roads field. Provision has been made for winter maintenance costs, which have been high in previous years. Furthermore, a reduction in the income from external agencies on contracts.

Engineering Services - underspend on various headings as well as a higher income receipts.

Municipal Services - a mixed picture which is a combination of factors, including the need to realise savings to the value of £117k. Pressures also on the budgets of street cleaning and public toilet cleaning staff. Income losses are issues for land maintenance and public toilets. Following recent work in the Crematorium, a reduction was seen in the associated income projections. Underspend on Street Enforcement and on Tidy Teams, which reduces the overspend reported.

Gwynedd Consultancy - projected performance over the income from external organisations such as other councils and the Welsh Government in the area of roads and engineering as well as vacancies and staff turnover.

Savings - the value of the financial savings not realised is £462k and so contributes to the overspend position reported. Although there has been some slippage with the delivery, the department will implement definitive steps over the next 12 months to achieve a proportion of the savings.

REVENUE BUDGET 2025/26- END OF NOVEMBER REVIEW

Environment Department	2025/26 Proposed Budget	2025/26 Estimated Position	Estimated Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26	Use of Other Sources or Other Adjustments Recommended	Estimated Adjusted Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26	Estimated August Review Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26
Area:-	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Management	783	941	158		158	161
Planning and Building Control Service	745	744	(1)		(1)	67
Street Care and Transport Services						
Network Management (Transportation)	349	(13)	(362)		(362)	(374)
Parking and Parking Enforcement	(2,614)	(2,401)	213		213	206
Integrated Transport	2,313	2,401	88		88	70
	48	(13)	(61)	0	(61)	(98)
Markets	8	8	0		0	(1)
Countryside and Access	772	780	8		8	7
Public Protection	1,938	1,902	(36)		(36)	(58)
Waste	14,686	15,303	617		617	662
Environment Total	18,980	19,665	685	0	685	740
<u>Income / Grant received in 2025/26 to be put into Funds</u>						
Parc Adfer Refinance Gain Share		(187)	(187)	187	0	
Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging		(3,713)	(3,713)	3,713	0	
Total	0	(3,900)	(3,900)	3,900	0	

Environment

Department Management - a delay in realising savings schemes to the value of £150k as well as an overspend on vehicle costs.

Planning and Building Control Service - although income deficit is an issue in Land Charges and Development Control, the planning fee income projections are now more favourable but continue to be longer than the target. Staff turnover and vacant posts assist the underspend on staff costs.

Projected costs to the value of £1.5 million relating to a dangerous building, namely the Corbett Arms Hotel, Tywyn, which is a Grade II listed building, which has been cause of concern for Cyngor Gwynedd and the local community for years as it is in a dangerous structural condition and has meant that the Council has had to act to protect and safeguard the public. On 16 December 2025, the Cabinet approved funding of £1.5 million from a financial strategy fund to fund the costs as the Department cannot cope with such levels of unexpected spending from their budget.

Network Management (Transportation) - exceeding the streetworks fees income, as well as vacant posts and underspend on many of the budget's headings.

Parking and Parking Enforcement - after parking fees were increased in April 2025, the parking income projections are better than the deficit of £826k reported in 2024/25 but continues to be £321k lower than the target. An underspend on staff and other budgets improves the situation.

Integrated Transport -the grants received for this area do not meet all the increasing costs of contracts. Projected underspend on staff costs and other budgets reduces the reported overspend.

Public Protection - vacant posts and less expenditure on many of the budget headings, including on vehicle costs. Projected to exceed income in trading standards but income down in the field of taxi licensing, licences and environmental protection.

Waste - although an additional budget of £400k has been allocated for 2025/26 onwards, several factors are responsible for the overspend of £617k projected. The work of restructuring and introducing changes to the field continue, with several steps associated with the process, with some of the steps slipping to 2026/27 and therefore several savings schemes slip as a result of the restructuring challenges. Overspend on waste collection and recycling, on disposal sites and on running the recycling centres. The income projections from the sale of materials has improved and therefore reduces the overspend on waste treatment and transfer sites.

Recycling Target 2024/25 - after Cyngor Gwynedd achieved a 65.3% rate for recycling in 2024/25 which is below the Welsh Government's 70% recycling target, this means that the Council is facing a £612k fine subject to an assessment against various criteria from the Government. We believe that the risk of forcing the fine on us is low and therefore we have not included this sum in the end of year projections.

Reclaiming the Shared Returns of Parc Adfer - One-off saving to all councils from the returns of re-funding Parc Adfer. The contribution has been placed in a fund, with the first call on it to be used to fund the overspending in the waste field.

Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging material - new income receipt for councils which derives from a levy on packaging for producers and retailers, to promote recycling. The first proportion of this income will have to be used to address any deficit from the waste service and the rest will be placed in a fund to prioritise.

Savings - savings to the value of £940k are not being realised by the department and are therefore contributing to the overspend position.

REVENUE BUDGET 2025/26- END OF NOVEMBER REVIEW

Housing and Property Department	2025/26 Proposed Budget	2025/26 Estimated Position	Estimated Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26	Use of Other Sources or Other Adjustments Recommended	Estimated Adjusted Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26	Estimated August Review Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26
Area:-	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Management	785	593	(192)		(192)	(136)
Housing Services						
Homelessness	6,791	7,322	531		531	463
Private Sector Housing	485	455	(30)		(30)	(66)
Others	446	349	(97)		(97)	(99)
	7,722	8,126	404	0	404	298
Property Services						
Property	3,882	3,893	11		11	(6)
Caretaking, Catering and Cleaning	11	36	25		25	11
	3,893	3,929	36	0	36	5
Housing and Property Total	12,400	12,648	248	0	248	167

Housing and Property

Management - underspending on services and supplies and on staffing costs.

Homelessness - the trend of significant pressure on the emergency accommodation service continues, with expenditure on the field forecast to be £6.6 million this year, compared to £6 million last year. An additional budget of £3m was allocated from council tax premium to emergency accommodation as well as an additional one-off budget allocated as part of the bids system and further to this to assist with the additional pressure. A combination of higher costs for moving and storing the personal property of households who receive emergency accommodation, and prices per night for emergency accommodation continue to be high with some providers. In addition to this, substantial progress was seen in the costs of private housing leasing.

Private Sector Housing - staff turnover and underspend on supplies and services. Reduction in the underspend reported since the August Review as there are costs associated with extending the National Empty Homes Scheme.

Housing Services, Others - underspend on staff costs and on property budgets as well as a grant receipt.

Property Services - underspend on staffing costs and travelling costs but pressure on the services and supplies budget in Property whilst lack of income is a problem in Pest Control.

Caretaking, Catering and Cleaning - income losses as a result of losing a cleaning contract and an overspend on the costs of services and supplies.

REVENUE BUDGET 2025/26- END OF NOVEMBER REVIEW

Central Departments	2025/26 Proposed Budget	2025/26 Estimated Position	Estimated Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26	Use of Other Sources or Other Adjustments Recommended	Estimated Adjusted Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26	Estimated August Review Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26
Area:-	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Corporate Management Team and Legal	2,950	2,936	(14)		(14)	(21)
Finance (and Information Technology)	9,346	9,333	(13)		(13)	(8)
Corporate Services	8,513	8,507	(6)		(6)	(6)
Central Departments Total	20,809	20,776	(33)	0	(33)	(35)

Central Departments

Corporate Management Team and Legal - exceeding income in various fields and a vacant post for part of the year responsible for the projected underspend. Various one-off costs will also be funded within the financial position.

Finance (and Information Technology) - staff turnover and attracting additional income assisting the department to cope with the substantial increase in the costs of processing income from the customers and residents of Gwynedd. It is also seen that there are pressures in terms of software costs and on various department systems become more apparent.

Corporate Services - underspend on staff costs and exceeding income in several areas including Translation, Customer Contact, Democracy and Human Resources and Health and Safety Advisory Service. The latest projections suggest that the Printroom will be overspending £35k by the end of the year.

REVENUE BUDGET 2025/26- END OF NOVEMBER REVIEW

Corporate (Reflects variances only)	2025/26 Proposed Budget	2025/26 Estimated Position	Estimated Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26	Use of Other Sources or Other Adjustments Recommended	Estimated Adjusted Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26	Estimated August Review Over / (Under) Spend 2025/26
Area:-	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Council Tax	*	*	(871)		(871)	0
Council Tax Reductions	*	*	412	(412)	0	0
Capital Costs	*	*	(1,612)	1,612	0	0
Interest	*	*	(631)	631	0	0
Savings Provision	*	*	0	0	0	0
Budgets / Bids Returned	*	*	(924)	924	0	0
Welsh Government grant towards salary costs	*	*	(602)	602	0	0
Others	*	*	(8)	8	0	0
Corporate Total	*	*	(4,236)	3,365	(871)	0

Corporate

Council Tax - additional council tax returns as a result of prudent projections when setting the 2025/26 budget. We saw 459 properties transfer from non-domestic rates to council tax up to the end of November (692 in 2024/25, 381 in 2023/24). However, contrary to this picture, the Valuer's Office allowed 163 properties to transfer from council tax to non-domestic rates (189 in 2024/25, 193 in 2023/24, 452 in 2022/23). In terms of the premium, up to the end of November, a reduction of 18 was seen in the number of premium second homes since the beginning of the year, which is contrary to the 387 seen last year. In 2025/26, £6 million in council tax premium has been earmarked for the Housing Strategy, and a further £3 million for the Homelessness field.

As noted in **Appendix 3**, following a recent review of the Council Tax Premium allocation for 2024/25, a similar review of the 2025/26 position is sustained after the end of the current financial year, so that the tax can be allocated appropriately.

Council Tax Reductions - following a campaign to target different groups to increase the number of applications, an increase was seen in the number who claim the reduction in Gwynedd over the past 15 months compared with the trend in previous years, therefore the spending is above the budget.

Capital Costs - a combination of factors create the underspend, including the favourable impact of the early repayment of a historical loan to the value of £16 million, which was not supposed to mature until 2078. In addition, a reduction in general capital costs as there was no need for external borrowing, therefore avoiding the associated costs.

Interest - projections that the interest received will exceed the expected target.

Savings Provision - following the inability of some departments to realise savings in certain areas, corporate provision has been made so that it is available to eliminate problematic savings and bridge the realisation of savings.

Budgets / Bids Returned - following a review of the council tax premium as noted in **Appendix 3**, it is considered appropriate that permanent bids to the value of £893k to the Homelessness field are now being funded from the premium, so that Council monies can be released. A bid that was not fully used this year was also returned.

Welsh Government grant towards salary costs - a grant receipt during the year towards the additional costs of public sector salaries, the grant will come into the settlement from the Welsh Government on a permanent basis from 2026/27 onwards.

It is recommended that £3.365 million is transferred to the Council's Financial Strategy Reserve, to be used at the end of the financial year to fund the overspend faced by the departments.

Following a reserve review exercise detailed in **Appendix 3**, that a transfer relating to the 2024/25 Council Tax Premium to the value of £2.089 million would be made from the Council's Financial Strategy Support Fund to the Council Tax Premium Fund, namely:

- £1.761 million relevant to the inflation of 2024/25, 2023/24 and 2022/23
- £328k for the remainder from the Council Tax Premium 2024/25.

Review of Reserves

Following a review of the reserves, it is recommended that the following transfers, relating to the council tax premium, should be implemented:

Fund	Sum to be transferred £'000
Move from:	
The Council's Financial Strategy Support Fund	(2,089)
Move to:	
Council Tax Premium Fund	2,089
Total	0

Additional allocation of Council Tax Premium for 2024/25

During 2024/25, it became apparent that the impacts of the changes on the thresholds of self-catering housing lettings (increase from 70 to 182 days) led to the property moving between tax classifications (non-domestic to domestic). This has affected the projected income expected to be collected through the premium.

The underspend on council tax for 2024/25 has been placed in the Council's Financial Strategy Support Fund during 2024/25 and when closing the accounts for the financial year. Therefore, it is now timely to carry out further review of council tax income and the premium deriving from the tax on second homes and empty properties for 2024/25.

The total value of council tax bills as well as the income received for the different types of accounts have been considered.

1. Background

The premium came into force in Gwynedd in 2018/19 at a rate of 50%, the rate was increased to 100% in 2021/22 and then to 150% from 2023/24 onwards, for the second home element only.

2 Inflation

£6 million annually – not increased with inflation - has been allocated towards the Housing Action Plan since 2021/22. £3 million has been allocated to the homelessness field since 2023/24, but this amount has been receiving inflation every year.

Adding inflation to the £6 million to correspond with the council tax increase rates would be as follows:

Table A: Inflation based on Council Tax increases since 2022/23.

	2021/22 £	2022/23 £	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
Premium Fund				
Sum to Fund	6,000,000	6,000,000	6,177,000	6,482,760
Council Tax Inflation %		2.95%	4.95%	9.54%
Council Tax Inflation £		177,000	305,760	618,460
Total	6,000,000	6,177,000	6,482,760	7,101,220
Value of Inflation (accumulative)		177,000	482,760	1,101,220

Therefore, the value of the £6 million increased to £7,101,220 for 2024/25, which is an increase of **£1,101,220**.

In addition to the above, to ensure that the appropriate inflation has also been allocated for 2022/23 and 2023/24, it is suggested that one-off amounts will be allocated for the two previous years, namely:

2022/23 - £177,000

2023/24 - £482,760

Total - £659,760

Therefore, a total inflation of £1,760,980, considering all aspects.

3 Remaining sum to be allocated

After considering the current liabilities and allocating inflation of an additional £1,760,980 to the £6m towards the Housing Action Plan, funding bids to the value of £893,150 to the Homelessness field already approved to be funded from basic revenue would release revenue funding to support setting the budget for 2026/27 and offer some protection for council tax.

It would leave a remainder of £328,400, with its use to be considered by the Cabinet in January 2026.

Table B: Income from the Premium and Liabilities

	£
Premium Tax collected	12,582,600
Current Liabilities	
£6 million	6,000,000
£3 million + inflation	3,207,230
Funding Taxation Posts	53,190
Funding Housing Posts	155,570
New Accountancy post	55,550
New Taxation Posts	128,530
Total Liabilities	9,600,070
 <i>Remainder after current commitments</i>	 2,982,530
 <i>2024/25 Inflation</i>	 1,101,220
 <i>2023/24 Inflation</i>	 482,760
 <i>2022/23 Inflation</i>	 177,000
 Total Inflation	 1,760,980
 Remainder after allocating inflation	 1,221,550
 Permanent Bids already allocated to the field, not currently being funded from the Premium	
Homelessness Service	57,560
Temporary Accommodation	308,880
Temporary Accommodation	412,150
Increase the Capacity of the Housing Options Homelessness Unit	114,560
	 893,150
 Remainder to transfer to the Council Tax Premium Fund	 328,400

4 Recommendation

Transfer £2,089,380, namely:

- £1,760,980 relevant to inflation
- £328,400 namely the remainder from the 2024/25 Premium

from the Council's Financial Strategy Support Fund to the Council Tax Premium Fund.

The use of the additional resource is being considered by the Cabinet.

Agenda Item 8

MEETING:	GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE
DATE:	15 JANUARY 2026
TITLE:	CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2025/26 – END OF NOVEMBER 2025 REVIEW
PURPOSE:	Monitoring Report on the Expenditure and Financing of the Capital Programme
ACTION:	Receive the information, consider the risks regarding the Capital Programme, and scrutinise the decisions for the Cabinet
CABINET MEMBER:	COUNCILLOR HUW WYN JONES
CONTACT OFFICER:	FFION MADOG EVANS, ASSISTANT HEAD OF FINANCE

1. In accordance with the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, the Governance and Audit Committee is expected to scrutinise some financial matters including budget monitoring reports, as appropriate.
2. The attached report (Capital Programme 2025/26 – End of November 2025 Review) will be presented to the Cabinet on 20 January 2026 for decisions regarding the revised programme and its financing.
3. The Cabinet Member for Finance and the Chairman of the Governance and Audit Committee have asked us to present this report to the Governance and Audit Committee to be scrutinised.
4. The Governance and Audit Committee is asked to note the position and any risks regarding the Council's capital programme, scrutinise the decisions for the Cabinet, and comment as necessary.

Appendices:

Cabinet report 20/01/2026: Capital Programme 2025/26 – End of November 2025 Review

CYNGOR GWYNEDD – Report to Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet

Item Title:	Capital Programme 2025/26 – End of November Review (30 November 2025 position)
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Huw Wyn Jones, Finance Cabinet Member
Relevant Officer:	Ffion Madog Evans, Assistant Head of Finance – Accountancy and Pensions
Meeting Date:	20 January 2026

1. Decision Sought:

- To accept the report on the end of November review (30 November 2025 position) of the capital programme.
- Approve the revision to the Capital Budget, approved on 6 March 2025 and revised on 11 November 2025, from the programme's financing perspective (as shown in part 3.2.3 of the report), that is:
 - a decrease of £7,544,000 in the use of borrowing
 - an increase of £2,660,000 in the use of grants and contributions
 - an increase of £103,000 in the use of revenue contributions
 - a decrease of £2,387,000 in the use of the capital reserve
 - an increase of £6,364,000 in the use of renewal and other reserves.

2. The reason why the Cabinet needs to make the decision:

It is the Cabinet's responsibility to act, as necessary, to secure appropriate control over the Council's budgets. It is necessary to ensure appropriate financing arrangements for the Council's plans to spend on capital. The Cabinet has the authority to adapt the capital programme. Approval is sought for the proposed programme (part 3.2.2) and financing (part 3.2.3).

These are recommended steps to ensure definite sources of funding for the 2025/26 – 2027/28 capital schemes.

3. Introduction and Rationale

3.1 Background/ Introduction

This technical report is presented as part of the 2025/26 budget review. The main purpose of the report is to present the revised capital programme and to approve the relevant financing sources. There is a summary in parts 3.2.2 and 3.2.3 of the report (the rationale and justification for recommending the decision) as follows:

- Part 3.2.1: Main Findings
- Part 3.2.2: Analysis by Department of the £152.136m capital programme for the 3 years 2025/26 – 2027/28.
- Part 3.2.3: The sources of finance for the net decrease of approximately £0.804m since the last review.
- Part 3.2.4: Detail of additional grants since the last review.
- Part 3.2.5: Analysis of the capital prudential indicators.

Incorporating funding via grant is a point of order for the Cabinet, but it is also necessary to deal with situations where there has been a change in expenditure profiles between years and the value of capital receipts and contributions.

These are technical issues regarding the financing of schemes and relevant implications and debates have already been addressed when the individual schemes were adopted.

3.2 Rationale of, and introduction to, the recommended decision

3.2.1 Main Findings

The main findings that arise from the revised position are:

- Clear plans are in place to invest approximately £93.7m in 2025/26 on capital projects, with £48.2m (51%) of it being financed by attracting specific grants.
- An additional £6m of proposed expenditure has been re-profiled from 2025/26 to 2026/27 and 2027/28, but no loss of funding was caused to the Council where schemes have slipped.

3.2.2 Capital Programme 2025/26 to 2027/28

See below the revised capital programme as at the end of November 2025, with the proposed revised position for the subsequent years:

DEPARTMENT	END OF NOVEMBER REVIEW				Increase/(Decrease) since the Last Review £000
	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000	Total £000	
Education	16,391	8,218	3,450	28,059	89
Environment	8,301	4,315	479	13,095	593
Corporate Support	-	-	-	-	-
Finance	1,196	737	1,248	3,181	80
Economy and Community	26,608	8,796	2,396	37,800	1,627
Housing and Property	21,549	5,375	4,103	31,027	(9,441)
Adults, Health and Wellbeing	2,769	2,700	-	5,469	69
Children and Supporting Families	2,877	764	700	4,341	146
Highways, Engineering and Consultancy	14,041	8,413	5,710	28,164	6,328
Corporate	-	500	500	1,000	(295)
TOTAL	93,732	39,818	18,586	152,136	(804)

3.2.3 Changes to the Sources of Finance

The budget for the three-year programme shows a decrease of £0.804m since the last review. The proposed sources of financing for this are noted below:

SOURCE OF FINANCE	END OF NOVEMBER REVIEW				Increase/(Decrease) since the Last Review £000
	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000	Total £000	
Supported Borrowing	4,070	4,070	4,070	12,210	-
Other Borrowing	9,930	4,760	-	14,690	(7,544)
Grants and Contributions	53,282	11,680	4,871	69,833	2,660
Capital Receipts	160	-	-	160	-
Departmental & Corporate Revenue	1,288	-	-	1,288	103
Capital Fund	3,872	11,800	4,350	20,022	(2,387)
Renewals & Other Funds	21,130	7,508	5,295	33,933	6,364
TOTAL	93,732	39,818	18,586	152,136	(804)

3.2.4 Additional Grants

Since the last review, the Council succeeded in attracting additional grants totalling £2.991m, the largest of which are listed below. Several additional adjustments bring the total movement to £2.660m (see Appendix 1 for more information):

- £1.000m Grant from the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) towards Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for packaging schemes
- £0.559m Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme (TACP) Grant from the Welsh Government
- £0.289m A grant from the Welsh Government's Brilliant Basics Fund towards the Enjoyment of Our Coast scheme

- £0.280m Grant from the Sports Council towards synthetic pitches
- £0.176m Grant towards the conservation of historic buildings from the Welsh Government
- £0.165m National Grid grant towards works at Parc Padarn

3.2.5 Capital Prudential Indicators

The CIPFA Prudential Code notes the need to report these Prudential Indicators (see Appendix 4 for more information).

3.3 Next Steps

To implement the recommendations to finance the programme.

4. Comments by Statutory Officers

4.1 Principal Finance Officer

I have collaborated with the Cabinet Member in the preparation of this report and I confirm the content.

4.2 Monitoring Officer

No observations to add in relation to propriety.

Appendices List:

Appendix 1 – Details of Main Changes

Appendix 2 – Details of Budget Reprofiling

Appendix 3 – Capital Expenditure First 8 months 2025/26

Appendix 4 – Capital Prudential Indicators 2025/26

Background Documents List:

2025/2026 Budgets: [Annual budgets](#)

Capital Strategy 2025/26 : Full Council 06/03/25 : [Item 10 - Capital Strategy 2025-26 including Investment and Borrowing Strategies.pdf](#)

Details of Main Changes

See below the relevant schemes that have caused the main changes to the sources of finance since the last review:

	2025/26 £'000	2026/27- 2027/28 £'000
Other Borrowing		
• Further adjustment towards the Foster Care House (<i>Children and Supporting Families Department</i>)	19	
• Welsh Government Local Government Borrowing Initiative (LGBI) - Road Deterioration Prevention scheme (<i>Highways, Engineering and Consultancy Department</i>).	4,702	3,135
• Re-profiling the Buy to Let element of the Housing Strategy to a period beyond this three-year Capital Programme to a period of more favourable economic circumstances (<i>Housing and Property Department</i>).	(12,520)	(2,880)
Grants and Contributions		
• Food Partnership capital grant from the Welsh Government (<i>Economy and Community Department</i>).	51	
• Grant towards the conservation of historic buildings from the Welsh Government (<i>Economy and Community Department</i>).	176	
• Adjustment to the grant from the UK Government's Levelling Up Fund (<i>Economy and Community Department</i>).	21	
• Grant from the Sports Council towards synthetic pitches (<i>Economy and Community Department</i>).	280	
• A grant from the Welsh Government's Brilliant Basics Fund towards the Enjoyment of Our Coast scheme (<i>Economy and Community Department</i>).	289	
• National Grid grant towards works at Parc Padarn (<i>Economy and Community Department</i>).	165	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grant from the Welsh Government's Marine and Fisheries Division towards fishing groins (<i>Economy and Community Department</i>). 	67
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sport Wales and Sports Association Wales grant towards swimming pools in the county (<i>Economy and Community Department</i>). 	125
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Housing with Care Fund (HCF) grant for children's homes from the Welsh Government (<i>Children and Supporting Families Department</i>). 	102
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health and Social Care Integration and Rebalancing Capital Fund Grant (IRCF) from Welsh Government (<i>Children and Supporting Families Department</i>). 	16
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Wales Play Opportunities Grant (<i>Children and Supporting Families Department</i>). 	10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional Integrated Fund (RIF) – additional grant from Welsh Government towards adapting establishments as well as facilitating joint working arrangements with other agencies (<i>Adults, Health and Wellbeing Department</i>). 	36
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adjustment of Welsh Government grant treatment towards the Barmouth Viaduct Gardens scheme (<i>Highways, Engineering and Consultancy Department</i>). 	(339)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning legislation contribution towards the car park at Y Gelli and Pendalar schools (<i>Environment Department</i>). 	20
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grant from the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) towards Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for packaging schemes (<i>Environment Department</i>). 	1,000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme (TACP) Grant from the Welsh Government (<i>Housing and Property Department</i>). 	559
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning legislation contribution towards a specific house (<i>Housing and Property Department</i>). 	74

Departmental and Corporate Revenue		
• Adjustment to the revenue contributions towards several schemes (<i>Education; Economy and Community; Highways, Engineering and Consultancy; Environment Departments</i>).	52	
• Departmental contributions towards computer equipment (<i>Finance Department</i>).	51	
Capital Fund		
• Modifications to various Asset Management Scheme schemes where profiles have been adjusted past the three years of the Capital Programme or grants and loan claims have been received and resources have been released for future apportionment (<i>Education; Highways, Engineering and Consultancy; Environment; Corporate Departments</i>).	(1,626)	(761)
Renewals and Other Funds		
• Vehicle and Equipment Renewals from departmental reserves (<i>Highways, Engineering and Consultancy; Environment; Finance Departments</i>).	541	
• Adjustment to match/additional funding contributions towards various schemes (<i>Economy and Community Department</i>).	361	
• Contribution towards countryside and car park schemes (<i>Environment Department</i>).	142	
• Adjustment to the contribution from the Council Tax Premium Fund towards the Housing Strategy schemes (<i>Housing and Property Department</i>).	5,319	

Details of Budget Reprofiling

See below the main schemes that have been reprofiled since the original budget:

	2025/26 £'000	2026/27 - 2027/28 £'000
Schools' Schemes (Sustainable Communities for Learning and Others) (<i>Education Department</i>)	(4,507)	4,507
Economic Stimulus Schemes and Industrial Units (<i>Economy and Community Department</i>)	(1,529)	1,529
Levelling Up Fund (<i>Economy and Community Department</i>)	(3,174)	3,174
Maritime, Country Parks and Leisure schemes (<i>Economy and Community Department</i>)	(1,272)	1,272
Children's Establishments (<i>Children and Supporting Families Department</i>)	(764)	764
Provision to Joint-fund Care Projects (<i>Adults, Health and Wellbeing Department</i>)	(1,200)	1,200
Road and Municipal schemes (<i>Highways, Engineering and Consultancy Department</i>)	(191)	191
Vehicle and Equipment Renewals (<i>Highways, Engineering and Consultancy; Environment; Housing and Property Departments</i>)	(2,782)	2,782
Transport schemes and Urban Improvements (<i>Environment Department</i>)	(309)	309
Car Parks (<i>Environment Department</i>)	(44)	44
Specialist Environment Department IT Systems (<i>Environment Department</i>)	(48)	48
Waste and Recycling Schemes (<i>Environment Department</i>)	(1,478)	1,478
Housing Strategy schemes (<i>Housing and Property Department</i>)	(160)	160
Housing Grants and Other Schemes (<i>Housing and Property Department</i>)	(947)	947

Smallholdings' Schemes (<i>Housing and Property Department</i>)	(50)	50
IT equipment renewals (<i>Finance Department</i>)	(14)	14

Note:

The above reprofiling will not result in any loss in grant.

There are a variety of valid reasons behind the reprofiling in many cases, but the delay prior to implementing these schemes can mean that the services must cope for longer with current assets which have not been improved.

APPENDIX 3

Capital Expenditure First 8 Months 2025/26

SUMMARY	CAPITAL PROGRAMME FULL YEAR (reviewed November) 2025/26	£'000	ACTUAL EXPENDITURE FOR THE 8 MONTHS TO 30/11/2025
			£'000
Education	16,391		7,266
Environment	8,301		1,224
Corporate Support		-	-
Finance (and Information Technology)	1,196		625
Economy and Community	26,608		6,424
Housing and Property	21,549		12,869
Adults, Health and Wellbeing	2,769		1,337
Children and Supporting Families	2,877		1,646
Highways, Engineering and Consultancy	14,041		4,031
Corporate		-	-
TOTAL	93,732		35,422

Note:

The percentage spent this year (37.79%) is higher than the position this time last year (amount spent in 5 months in 2024/25 was 33%), and higher than two years ago (27% in 2023/24).

APPENDIX 4

Capital Prudential Indicators 2025/26

The Council measures and manages its capital expenditure and borrowing with references to the following indicators.

It is now a requirement of the CIPFA Prudential Code that these are reported on a regular basis.

The latest position and information are reflected here.

Capital Expenditure

The Council has undertaken and is planning capital expenditure as summarised below.

	2024/25 Actual £m	2025/26 Forecast £m	2026/27 Budget £m	2027/28 Budget £m
General Fund Services	85.0	94.1	40.2	18.9
Leasing General Fund	5.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
TOTAL	90.3	94.1	40.2	18.9

The main General Fund capital projects in 2025/26 y include (see the review reports for reprofiling details as applicable):

- Sustainable Communities for Learning Schemes - £12.4m
- Levelling Up Fund Schemes - £11.0m
- Housing Schemes/Strategy - £7.5m
- Departmental Vehicles - £6.9m
- Adults' Homes/ Centres - £4.5m
- Property Schemes - £3.9m

Capital Financing Requirement

The Council's cumulative outstanding amount of debt finance is measured by the capital financing requirement (CFR). This increases with new debt-financed capital expenditure and reduces with Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) and capital receipts used to replace debt.

	31.3.2025 Actual £m	31.3.2026 Forecast £m	31.3.2027 Budget £m	31.3.2028 Budget £m
General Fund Services	179.9	187.4	189.8	187.2

Gross Debt and the Capital Financing Requirement

Statutory guidance is that debt should remain below the capital financing requirement, except in the short-term. The Council has complied and expects to continue to comply with this requirement in the medium term as is shown below.

	31.3.2025 Actual £m	31.3.2026 Forecast £m	31.3.2027 Budget £m	31.3.2028 Budget £m	Debt at 30.11.2025 £m
Debt (including Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and leases)	100.1	79.2	73.8	71.8	82.7
Capital Financing Requirement	179.9	187.4	189.8	187.2	

Debt and the Authorised Limit and Operational Boundary

The Council is legally obliged to set an affordable borrowing limit (also termed the authorised limit for external debt) each year. In line with statutory guidance, a lower “operational boundary” is also set as a warning level should debt approach the limit.

	Maximum Debt 2025/26 £m	Debt at 30.11.2025 £m	2025/26 Authorised Limit £m	2025/26 Operational Boundary £m	Complied?
Borrowing	94.1	76.7			
Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and Finance Leases	6.0	6.0			
Total Debt	100.1	82.7	200	190	Yes

Since the operational boundary is a management tool for in-year monitoring it is not significant if the boundary is breached on occasions due to variations in cash flow, and this is not counted as a compliance failure.

Proportion of Financing Costs to Net Revenue Stream

Although capital expenditure is not charged directly to the revenue budget, interest payable on loans and Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) are charged to revenue. The net annual charge is known as financing costs; this is compared to the net revenue stream i.e. the amount funded from Council Tax, National Non-Domestic Rates and general government grants.

	2024/25 Actual	2025/26 Forecast	2026/27 Budget	2027/28 Budget
Financing Costs (£m)	8.5	10.7	10.7	10.8
Proportion of Net Revenue Stream (%)	2.5%	3.0%	3.0%	2.9%

Treasury Management Indicators

These indicators (Liability Benchmark, Maturity Structure of Borrowing, Long-Term Treasury Management Investments) are reported separately as part of the Treasury Management Report for the period under review.

Agenda Item 9

MEETING:

GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

DATE:

15 JANUARY 2026

TITLE:

**SAVINGS OVERVIEW:
PROGRESS REPORT ON REALISING SAVINGS SCHEMES**

PURPOSE:

Report on the Latest Position

ACTION:

**Receive the information, consider the general risks arising
from the savings slippages**

CABINET MEMBER: **COUNCILLOR HUW WYN JONES**

CONTACT OFFICER: **FFION MADOG EVANS, ASSISTANT HEAD OF FINANCE**

1. In accordance with the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, the Governance and Audit Committee is expected to scrutinise some financial matters as appropriate.
2. The attached report (Savings Overview: Progress report on realising savings schemes) will be submitted to the Cabinet on 20 January 2026.
3. The Cabinet Member for Finance, and the Chairman of the Governance and Audit Committee have asked us to present this report to the Governance and Audit Committee to be scrutinised.
4. The Governance and Audit Committee is requested to note the position and the relevant risks regarding the Savings Overview, consider the decisions for the Cabinet and comment as necessary.

Appendices:

Cabinet Report 20/01/2026: Savings Overview: Progress report on realising savings schemes

CYNGOR GWYNEDD –Report to Cyngor Gwynedd's Cabinet

Subject:	Savings Overview: Progress Report on Realising Savings Schemes
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Huw Wyn Jones, Cabinet Member for Finance
Contact officer:	Ffion Madog Evans, Assistant Head of Finance - Accounting and Pensions
Date:	20 January 2026

1. The decision sought

1.1 To accept the information in the report and to note the progress towards realising the savings schemes for 2025/26 and previous years.

2. The reason why it is necessary that the Cabinet makes the decision

2.1 Realising the individual schemes is the responsibility of relevant members of the Cabinet, who challenge the performance of the departments including the progress of the savings schemes. It is the responsibility of the Cabinet Member for Finance to keep an overview of the whole picture.

3. Introduction and Rationale

Background / Introduction

3.1 This report provides an overview of the Council's savings' situation for 2025/26 and previous years following a review of the situation at the end of November 2025.

3.2 In the 2025/26 Budget report to the Full Council on 6 March 2025, it was reported that savings of £3.5 million were profiled for the 2025/26 budget. Savings to the value of £100k was approved by the Cabinet on 11 February 2025, while £3.4 million are savings schemes approved in previous years, but relevant to 2025/26.

4. Rationale and justification for recommending the decision

The Council has financial planning arrangements in place which have already identified significant efficiency savings over recent years to minimise service cuts to the residents of Gwynedd.

5. Historical Departmental Savings Schemes 2015/16 – 2025/26

- 5.1 **Appendix 1** summarises each department's achievement against their savings target of **£34.4m** for the period 2015/16 – 2025/26 based on the November 2025 review. **It can be reported that £33.8m worth, or 98% of these schemes have been realised**, but the risk of realising some of the savings' schemes remains.
- 5.2 Three schemes from the Adults, Health and Wellbeing Department, with a total value of £398k and one scheme worth £20k from the Economy and Community Department face risks to deliver. See part 8 of the report for further details.
- 5.3 Five remaining schemes worth £172k have slipped but the departments do not foresee a problem realising them.

6. Departmental Savings Schemes 2023/24 – 2025/26

- 6.1 **Appendix 2** summarises each department's achievement against the savings target for the period 2023/24 – 2025/26, **which totals over £15m** based on the November 2025 review. **It can be reported that over £13m, or 81% of these schemes have already been realised, with a further £389k or 3% on track to deliver fully and in a timely manner.**
- 6.2 There are significant risks to the realisation of two schemes worth £71k in the areas of Older People's Homes, and Health and Wellbeing in the Adults, Health and Well-being Department and the department is looking at how they can deliver them.
- 6.3 It is currently anticipated that there are some risks of realising £2m of savings schemes which include three schemes from the Education Department (£66k), five schemes from the Environment Department (£828k), four from the Adults, Health and Wellbeing Department (£685k), two from the Highways and Engineering Department (£321k) and one scheme from the Housing and Property Department (£95k).
- 6.4 There is a slippage on one scheme worth £71k that was profiled to be realised in 2023/24 and some delay in realising schemes worth £305k relevant to 2024/25, but the departments do not anticipate problems to realise them. There is a delay on two schemes relevant to 2025/26 worth £120k.
- 6.5 A further eleven schemes totalling £389k are on track to deliver fully and in a timely manner.

7. Departmental Savings Schemes 2026/27 onwards

- 7.1** A Medium-Term Financial Plan has already been submitted to Cabinet on 16 September 2025 which considers the financial gap for 2026/27 and the intention to respond to the financial situation facing us as a Council to set a balanced budget in 2026/27.
- 7.2** Following the announcement of the draft financial settlement on 24 November 2025 followed by the further announcement on 9 December on the budget agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru, the outlook is now less critical than originally anticipated. Although Gwynedd ranks lowest of the 22 Councils, the announcement of a floor of 4.1% means that there is no need to rush to implement savings for 2026/27, but savings for subsequent years will need to continue to be identified which are likely to be much more challenging. The savings will be subject to a report shortly.
- 7.3** Current savings from 2026/27 onwards, worth £681k per Department, are listed in **Appendix 3**, it is currently premature to report on the status of these schemes.

8. Savings realisation review

- 8.1** The income target of the Neuadd Dwyfor scheme by the Economy and Community Department, has been reduced from £100k to £20k on a temporary basis for 2025/26 and 2026/27, to allow time to identify opportunities to implement. A sum of £80k a year for a period of two years will be bridged from the Council's Savings Provision.
- 8.2** A savings scheme related to 2025/26 in the Customer Contact area by the Corporate Services Department was deleted in the last review. The value of that saving was £25k.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1** It can be reported that a total of almost £47 million of savings have been realised since 2015/16, which is 93% of the required £50 million over the period. Realising the savings has inevitably been challenging and I am grateful to all the departments and Cabinet Members for ensuring this success.
- 9.2** The table below summarises the latest position of the savings schemes since April 2015 with 93% of all schemes realised.

Table 1: Summary of the status of all savings schemes since April 2015

Status of Savings	Portal	£m	%
Have realised	1	46.5	93
On track to achieve savings in full and on time	2	0.4	1
Slippage/Delay, but moving forward	3	0.6	1
Some risks to achieve - slip or fail	4	2.0	4
Significant risks to realise in full or partially	5	0.5	1
Total savings		50.0	100

9.3 I therefore ask the Cabinet to note the achievement outlined in this report towards realising the savings schemes.

10. Next steps and timetable

10.1 Implement the recommendations stated in this report and submit a follow-up report to the Cabinet following the final position at the end of the 2025/26 financial year.

11. View of the Statutory Officers

11.1 Head of Finance

I have collaborated with the Cabinet Member in the preparation of this report and I confirm the content.

11.2 Monitoring Officer

No observations to add in relation to propriety.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Overview of Historical Savings Schemes 2015/16 - 2025/26 per Department

Appendix 2 - Overview of Savings Schemes 2023/24 - 2025/26 per Department

Appendix 3 - Overview of Savings Schemes 2026/27 onwards per Department

OVERVIEW OF HISTORICAL SAVINGS SCHEMES FOR 2015/16 TO 2025/26 PER DEPARTMENT

TABLE 1
SCHEMES THAT HAVE REALISED

Department	Total Savings 2015/16 to 2025/26 £	Schemes that have realised £	Percentage of schemes that have realised
Education	1,659,740	1,659,740	100%
Schools	4,331,620	4,331,620	100%
Environment	2,972,463	2,959,963	99.6%
Corporate Services	2,569,218	2,569,218	100%
Finance	1,881,636	1,881,636	100%
Economy and Community	2,916,422	2,851,422	98%
Adults, Health and Well-being	6,794,981	6,317,451	93%
Children and Supporting Families	2,318,908	2,318,908	100%
Highways, Engineering and Gwynedd Consultancy	6,531,580	6,496,580	99%
Corporate Management Team and Legal	403,240	403,240	100%
Housing and Property	843,230	843,230	100%
Sub-total	33,223,038	32,633,008	98%
Managerial Savings	1,200,360	1,200,360	100%
TOTAL	34,423,398	33,833,368	98%

TABLE 2
SCHEMES YET TO BE REALISED

Adran	2019/20 £	2020/21 £	2021/22 £	2022/23 £	2023/24 £	2024/25 £	2025/26 £	Total £
Environment				12,500				12,500
Economy and Community		45,000					20,000	65,000
Adults, Health and Well-being	215,600	49,360			12,570		200,000	477,530
Highways, Engineering and Gwynedd Consultancy		8,750	26,250					35,000
TOTAL	215,600	103,110	26,250	12,500	12,570	0	220,000	590,030

Department	Head of Finance's comments
Environment (1 scheme)	A £12.5k balance slippage on one scheme which is <i>To provide electric car charging points in car parks</i> (£50k).
Economy and Community (2 schemes)	There has been a delay on the scheme <i>To establish parking fees on Dinas Dinlle beach and to increase launch fees across Gwynedd beaches from £10 to £15</i> (£45k), it is intended that permanent arrangements to raise parking fees will become operational during 2026/27. Due to the risk of not being able to implement the savings of the Neuadd Dwyfor scheme, it was decided to reduce the income target from £100k to £20k for 2025/26 and 2026/27, in order to give time to identify opportunities to implement.
Adults, Health and Well-being (5 schemes)	There are significant risks of achieving savings of £200k on the <i>Development plan for 3 other Extra Care Housing projects in Gwynedd (Pwllheli Area, Ffestiniog, South Meirionnydd)</i> scheme, £186k on the <i>Integration and transformation of Older People's Services</i> scheme and £13k on the <i>Review the operating arrangements within the Adults Department</i> scheme. There has been a slippage on 2 schemes namely <i>Restructuring the Business Service by reducing support for teams within the Department and the Children's Department</i> (£49k) and <i>Increasing income and reducing other costs</i> which have a balance of £30k but the Department does not anticipate problems realising them.
Highways, Engineering and Gwynedd Consultancy (1 scheme)	The Barmouth Bridge scheme - not paying Network Rail for the right of way over the bridge (£35k) has slipped but the department is still in discussions with Network Rail.

OVERVIEW OF NEW SAVINGS SCHEMES FROM 2023/24 TO 2025/26 PER DEPARTMENT

Department	Total of new savings from 2023/24 to 2025/26		Realised Schemes		Schemes on track to be completed on time		Schemes slipping and schemes with some risks of achieving the savings		Head of Finance's comments
	£ - number	£ - number	£ - number	£ - number	£ - number	£ - number	£ - number	£ - number	
Education	1,456,510	34	1,390,770	31	-		65,740	3	The department anticipates some risks of realising the savings of 3 schemes (2 profiled in 2024/25) namely <i>Transfer of Maesgeirchen Youth Center to Maes NI Community Hub</i> (£25k), <i>Cut 25% of the Key Stage 4 Behaviour hubs' budget</i> (£18k) and <i>Delete one level 3 assistant post in the Inclusion Team</i> (£23k).
Schools	1,966,100	1	1,966,100	1	-		-	-	The one scheme for the period has been achieved.
Environment	2,147,380	36	1,219,380	30 *	50,000	1	878,000	5	The department anticipates some risks of realising the savings of 5 schemes worth a total of £828k including <i>Rationalisation of departmental support arrangements</i> (£150k), <i>savings in Waste services</i> (£200k) and <i>Commercial Waste services</i> (£240k), <i>Parking and Streetworks - Extending Parking Enforcement Hours in Council Short Stay Car Parks</i> (£78k) and <i>Parking and Streetworks - Adjustment to Band 2 Long Stay Fee Structure</i> (£160k). There is a slippage on 1 scheme worth £50k but it is moving forward and 1 scheme is on track to deliver in a timely manner.
Corporate Services	711,410	25	558,410	21	153,000	4	-	-	There are 4 schemes on track to realise in a timely manner.
Finance	977,640	22	757,030	17	90,000	2	130,610	3	There has been a slippage on 3 schemes namely 2 schemes to restructure the Income Unit worth a total of £59k and 1 scheme to restructure the Information Technology Service worth £72k. There are 2 further schemes on track to materialise in a timely manner.
Economy and Community	648,780	41	623,780	40	25,000	1	-	-	Cwmni Byw'n Iach has 1 scheme on track to deliver in a timely manner.
Adults, Health and Well-being	2,498,770	27	1,482,850	18	50,680	2 *	965,240	7 *	The Department anticipates significant risks to realise savings of 2 schemes namely <i>Homes for Older People: looking at arrangements for preparing second choice meals in care homes</i> (£50k) and <i>Health and Wellbeing: reducing the hours of a Well-being Officer</i> (£20k). In addition there are some risks to the realisation of 4 schemes (1 of these in part) worth a total of £685k which includes 1 scheme in the <i>Residential Homes</i> field (partial £50k) and 3 schemes in the <i>Learning Disabilities</i> field (total of £635k). There was a slippage from 2024/25 on 3 schemes (1 of these in part) worth a total of £110k and a delay on 1 scheme worth £100k in 2025/26. There are 2 schemes worth a total of £51k on track to be realised in a timely manner.

Department	Total of new savings from 2023/24 to 2025/26		Realised Schemes		Schemes on track to be completed on time		Schemes slipping and schemes with some risks of achieving the savings		Head of Finance's comments	
Children and Supporting Families	308,140	8	308,140	8	-		-		The schemes for the period have all been achieved.	
Highways, Engineering and Consultancy	1,558,940	22	1,131,940	18	-		427,000	4	The department anticipates risks of realising 2 scheme namely <i>Restructuring the Highways Service (£250k)</i> and <i>Reducing resources by combining the Ground Maintenance Service with the Street Scene service scheme (£71k)</i> . There was a slippage from 2024/25 relating to 2 schemes namely <i>Improving the efficiency/rationalisation of highway depot sites (£60k)</i> and <i>Changing the upland/frequency/vertical cutting order and the time between the growing season (£46k)</i> .	
Corporate Management Team and Legal	161,190	8	161,190	8	-		-		The schemes for the period have all been achieved.	
Housing and Property	780,350	14	664,850	12	20,000	1	95,500	1	There are some risks of delivering £95.5k of savings on the <i>Reducing our office space due to new ways of working</i> scheme, and 1 scheme on track to realise in a timely manner.	
Managerial Savings	2,400,000	1	2,400,000	1	-		-		The one scheme for the period has been achieved.	
TOTAL	15,615,210	239	12,664,440	205	388,680	11	2,562,090	23	In financial terms (£), 81% of the new 2023/24 to 2025/26 savings schemes have already been realised and a further 3% are on track to be delivered on time by the end of the financial year.	

* schemes with different status splits in the years they have been profiled

OVERVIEW OF SAVINGS SCHEMES 2026/27 ONWARDS PER DEPARTMENT

Department	2026/27	2027/28	Total 2026/27 and 2027/28 Savings	
	£	£	£ - number	
Education	98,500	98,500	197,000	1
Environment	200,000	-	200,000	1
Corporate Services	50,000	-	50,000	1
Adults, Health and Well-being	143,090	-	143,090	2
Highways, Engineering and Consultancy	91,000	-	91,000	1
TOTAL	582,590	98,500	681,090	6

Agenda Item 10

MEETING:	GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE
DATE:	15 JANUARY 2026
TITLE:	Council Tax Reduction Policy under Section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992
PURPOSE:	In accordance with the Committee's request, consideration will be given to the content of the Policy Cabinet-approved
CABINET MEMBER:	COUNCILLOR HUW WYN JONES
CONTACT OFFICER:	DEWI MORGAN, HEAD OF FINANCE SIAN PUGH, ASSISTANT HEAD OF FINANCE

1. In accordance with the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, the Governance and Audit Committee is expected to take an overview of the Council's financial matters.
2. Section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 gives the Council discretionary powers to reduce the amount of Council Tax payable for individuals, or for classes of taxpayers. The report in the Appendix was submitted to Cabinet on 11 November 2025. The Policy was approved as presented, and in accordance with Council procedures it was implemented on 26 November 2025 as the decision was not called in pursuant to section 7.25 of the Constitution of Cyngor Gwynedd:

Cabinet Decisions 11 November

3. Prior to the adoption of the Policy, Cyngor Gwynedd had used Section 13A of the 1992 Act to introduce local, optional exceptions in very limited cases. For example, on 8 April 2025 Cabinet decided to use Section 13A to give Foster Carers in Gwynedd a local discount, and project 3e in the Housing Action Plan uses the power to give a tax rebate to first-time buyers repairing a property, beyond the statutory exemption.
4. The Policy is intended to provide officers with guidance as to what Council Tax accounts, and under what circumstances, a discount could be granted in accordance with the broad powers that the Council has under Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992. This is a broad power and must be exercised wisely, carefully and proportionately to protect the Council from allegations of maladministration by unfairly discriminating in the exercise of power, or accusation of improper actions. This is particularly true with basic Council Tax, where any reductions are subsidised by the rest of Gwynedd's taxpayers.
5. When introducing a Policy to deal with taxation cases under Section 13A, it is essential that the officers of the Taxation Service have clear guidelines to follow so that the cases under consideration deal with genuinely exceptional cases. Given the value of Council Tax bills, there is a risk that officers will come under pressure to enforce the Policy in cases where which are not appropriate. The Policy has also put in place – for the first time – a mechanism for a panel of members and officers to consider cases that do not fall into a category outlined in the Policy, but which are nevertheless genuinely exceptional or to rectify a situation where a wider local policy is having an unintended consequences. The members of this Panel are the Cabinet Member for Finance, Head of Finance and/or Assistant Head of Finance and the Taxation Manager.

6. The Panel will meet quarterly during 2026. In addition to the member identified above, the Head of Legal Services and the Corporate Director are invited to attend the meetings. The Panel will consider the cases that have come to the attention of the Tax Service over the past few months for consideration for a tax reduction.
7. These cases include several properties that have become subject to Council Tax Premium as a result of increasing the threshold for properties to qualify for the business rates list, where these properties have historically been small family businesses, as discussed at the Governance and Audit Committee meeting on 13 November 2025.
8. Since an exemption from the basic tax using Section 13A is a direct cost on the Council's funds, the power must be exercised very carefully, while at the same time avoiding setting a precedent that could harm the Council financially in the long term.
9. With regard to the Premium, the Welsh Government has recently consulted which may lead to an adaptation of the statutory exemptions. We will keep the Policy under ongoing review and adapt it as any legislative changes are introduced.
10. The Governance and Audit Committee is asked to identify the relevant position and risks in relation to the content of the Policy, consider the Cabinet's decision and comment as necessary.

Attachments:

Cabinet Report 11/11/2025: Council Tax Reduction Policy under Section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992



Item title:	Council Tax Reduction Policy under Section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Huw Wyn Jones Cabinet Member for Finance
Relevant Officer:	Dewi Morgan, Head of Finance Sian Pugh, Assistant Head of Finance
Meeting date:	11 November 2025

1. DECISION SOUGHT

1.1 The adoption of a Council Tax Reduction Policy under Section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 to provide officers with clear guidance and boundaries on the use of reductions and exemptions from the standard Council Tax and the Premium.

2. THE REASON WHY CABINET NEEDS TO MAKE THE DECISION:

2.1 Section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, gives the Council additional discretionary powers to reduce the amount of Council Tax payable for individuals, or for classes of taxpayers. Section 13A does not impose a restriction on its use so the requirement for careful and consistent use, without setting a prejudicial precedent, is essential.

2.2 This policy sets out the criteria and process for awarding discretionary reductions to Council Tax in accordance with Section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992

2.3 Currently, Cyngor Gwynedd has used Section 13A of the 1992 Act to introduce local, optional exceptions in very limited cases. For example, on 8 April 2025 the Cabinet decided to use Section 13A to give a local discount to Foster Carers in Gwynedd, and 3e project in the Housing Action Plan uses the power to give a tax rebate to first-time buyers who are repairing a property, beyond the statutory exemption.

- 2.4 Any action to exercise this power must be consistent with other legislation (e.g. Equality Act, Well-being of Future Generations Act). In accordance with the Constitution of the Council and Section 67 of the 1992 Act, the use of Section 13A is a matter for the Cabinet, it is not a matter which must have a full Council decision. The power under Section 13A (1)(c) is broad, and allows the billing authority to reduce the Council Tax bill of any dwelling for any period as the billing authority considers fit.
- 2.5 A copy of the Council Tax Reduction Policy under Section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 can be found at Appendix 1. It is good practice to have such a Policy in order to ensure transparency and consistency, with clear guidance for officers but at the same time explaining the steps that need to be taken to deal with cases that are truly exceptional.

3. INTRODUCTION AND REASONING

- 3.1 Section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, gives the Council additional discretionary powers to reduce the amount of Council Tax payable for individuals, or for classes of taxpayers, in exceptional circumstances. This includes the power to reduce the amount payable to nothing.
- 3.2 This is separate and distinct from the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, which has replaced Council Tax Benefit since 2013. The Council Tax Reduction Scheme is decided annually by the full Council, usually at its meeting in December, and in accordance with statute before 31 January.
- 3.3 Whilst the Council Tax Reduction Scheme exists to provide support for those liable to pay the tax, some provision is needed for those residents who find themselves in 'exceptional' circumstances and need short-term support to meet their Council Tax obligation.
- 3.4 It is important to define what could be considered exceptional and in this case it would be a situation that was not typical, completely unusual and only likely to occur very rarely. Exceptional situations for the purposes of this scheme are likely to be things outside the taxpayer's control, such as flooding of properties as an example.
- 3.5 Cyngor Gwynedd must bear the full cost of awarding any Section 13A reductions. The Council must therefore balance the need of the individual council payers who need support against the interests of council tax payers in general.

- 3.6 Sections 12A and 12B of the 1992 Act give the Welsh Ministers powers to make regulations to prescribe one or more classes of dwellings to which councils may not decide to apply a premium. The Council Tax (Exceptions to Higher Amounts) (Wales) Regulations 2015 are made under these powers a premium cannot be levied on a dwelling that falls under an exception.
- 3.7 The regulations prescribe seven classes of exempt dwellings. Classes 1, 2, 3 and 4 apply to long-term vacant properties and second homes. Classes 5, 6 and 7 apply to second homes only.
- 3.8 Details of these exceptions can be found in the following statutory guidance:
<https://www.gov.wales/council-tax-empty-and-second-homes-html>

4. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 In formulating the proposed Policy (at Appendix 1) consideration has been given to cases that have been submitted to the Finance Department over a number of years. These could be applications for a reduction in basic Council Tax, the Premium, or both.
- 4.2 As an exemption from the basic Tax using Section 13A is a direct cost on the Council's coffers, the power must be exercised very carefully, while at the same time avoiding setting a precedent that could harm the Council financially in the long run.
- 4.3 At the same time, fairness and consistency must be ensured in the use of this force. A copy of the Equality Impact Assessment can be found at Appendix 2.
- 4.4 The Finance Department is also aware that consultations are underway or have recently closed in order to modify some of the statutory exemptions. We will keep the Policy under ongoing review and adapt it as any legislative changes are introduced. A prominent example of this in Gwynedd is challenges by owners of second homes used for the purposes of self-catering accommodation and failing to meet the 182 day threshold to be on the non-domestic rates list. This is currently the subject of consultation by the Welsh Government which could lead to a change in the regulations.
- 4.5 Supporting Community Enterprises is a priority for the Council and therefore the Policy supports tax exemptions for these initiatives. Nevertheless, it is assessed that there is a risk that bogus Community Enterprises may be set up in order to avail of any tax relief so it is proposed that a Panel considers any Community Enterprise on its own merits to ensure that it is genuinely established in order to support the community. There is no proposal, therefore, that a Community Enterprise be subject to any exceptions without a detailed assessment of the individual case first.

5. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 The protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act, the Socio-Economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales, the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or review of policies, strategies, services and functions. It is considered that no significant or unacceptable equality effects will result from this report.
- 5.2 The Equality Impact Assessment is included in Appendix 2.

6. THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS (WALES) ACT 2015

- 6.1 The original aim of the Council Tax Section 13A Reduction Policy is to reduce inequalities resulting from socio-economic disadvantage.
- 6.2 There is a duty to act in accordance with the principle of sustainable development, which is to seek to ensure that the needs of the present are met without jeopardising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. In acting in accordance with this general duty the Council needs to take into account the importance of long-term impact, being integrated, inclusive, collaborative and preventive in the development and implementation of the proposal before it.
- 6.3 The well-being goals set out in the Act have been considered in the preparation of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable impacts on the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report.

7. NEXT STEPS

- 7.1 The Policy is adopted to be effective for the remainder of 2025-26 and until it is reviewed or repealed.

STATUTORY OFFICER OPINION:**Monitoring Officer:**

The Government Guidance "**Council Tax on Empty Homes and Homes Guidance for local authorities on council tax premiums for long-term empty properties and second homes**" provides guidance on the use of statutory discretion in relation to the premium. Having a Policy allows the Cabinet to establish a statement about how applications for exemptions from either Council Tax and/or Premium will be considered. It is also noted that a review of the exemption regulations is also underway and the intention to keep the Policy under review is emphasised. The recommendation provides a framework for addressing applications.

Head of Finance:

I have collaborated with the Cabinet Member in the preparation of this report, and I confirm the content.

Council Tax Reduction Policy under Section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992

Cyngor Gwynedd

1. Purpose of the Policy

This policy sets out the criteria and process for awarding a discretionary reduction to Council Tax under Section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992. Its aim is to offer support to residents who are facing exceptional financial hardship or unusual circumstances.

2. Scope

The policy applies to:

- Individuals experiencing temporary financial hardship.
- Vulnerable groups (e.g. care leavers, victims of domestic abuse).
- Cases where the liability to pay Council Tax arises due to unforeseen or exceptional events.
- Any other groups defined by the Council's Cabinet in order to facilitate the realisation of the authority's objectives.
- Certain cases where there is an exemption from the Council Tax Premium, but not basic Council Tax, in addition to the statutory exemptions that have been outlined in legislation.

3. Background

Section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, gives the Council additional discretionary powers to reduce the amount of Council Tax payable for individuals, or for classes of taxpayers. This includes the power to reduce the amount payable to nothing.

This is separate and distinct from the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, which has replaced Council Tax Benefit since 2013. The Council Tax Reduction Scheme is decided annually by the full Council, usually at its meeting in December, and in accordance with statute before 31 January.

Whilst the Council Tax Reduction Scheme exists to provide support for those liable to pay the tax, some provision is needed for those residents who find themselves in 'exceptional' circumstances and need short-term support to meet their Council Tax obligation.

It is important to define what could be considered exceptional and in this case it would be a situation that was not typical, completely unusual and only likely to occur very rarely. Exceptional

situations for the purposes of this scheme are likely to be things outside the taxpayer's control, such as flooding of properties as an example.

Cyngor Gwynedd must bear the full cost of awarding any reductions to basic Council Tax under Section 13A. The Council must therefore balance the need of the individual council payers who need support against the interests of council tax payers in general.

An exemption from the Premium (in part or in full) will result in fewer resources being collected to realise the purpose of the Premium.

4. Eligibility Criteria

Basic Council Tax Reduction

Applicants must:

- Be liable for Council Tax on properties within the Cyngor Gwynedd area.
- Have explored all other forms of support (e.g. Council Tax Reduction Scheme, exemptions, discounts).
- Show evidence of financial hardship or exceptional circumstances.
- Show that the situation is not the result of negligence or deliberate failure to pay.

Reducing or eliminating Council Tax Premium on Second Homes or Long-Term Empty Properties

- In cases where an application is made for an exemption from the Council Tax Premium, an effort must be made to bring a vacant property back into use or evidence to be able to carry out a fair assessment to determine that the circumstances are truly exceptional.

5. General Principles:

It must be recognised that any decision to reduce or eliminate Council Tax for a taxpayer is funded by other taxpayers, so all applications must be considered in terms of benefit to the community and the County taxpayers. Similarly, lowering the level of the Premium results in fewer resources available to meet its intent.

- All applications must be considered in accordance with this procedure, fully and fairly.
- Those considering an application are required to be objective.
- Requests should be dealt with in a timely manner.
- Clear and simple guidelines need to be set and followed.
- This Policy will be reviewed regularly, taking into account any guidance from the Welsh Government and neighbouring council arrangements.
- Although each application is considered individually, consistency between applications should be ensured.

6. The Application Process

Applications must:

- Be submitted in writing by the responsible person or authorised representative.
- Contain:
 - The amount and period for which a reduction is requested.
 - Reasons for the request.
 - Evidence of income, expenditure, debt, and mitigation measures.
 - Where only a reduction in the Premium is applied, evidence showing that the exemption applies in accordance with this Policy.

7. Decision Making

Each application will be assessed according to its individual merit. The Council will consider:

- Financial circumstances of the applicant.
- The effect of not awarding the discount.
- Cost to the public purse.
- Whether the applicant has taken reasonable steps to resolve the situation.

The decision procedure will be as follows:

- All applications must be in writing and clearly state that an application under Part 13A and this policy is being made.
- An application can relate to a financial year, part of a financial year or a time range (up to 6 years) – the relevant period must be stated in the application.
- Unless the decision to reduce the tax or premium has been made for a specified period, no reduction will extend beyond the end of the current financial year.
- All applicants are required to provide full and clear relevant details to enable those assessing the application to arrive at an accurate, timely and in accordance with the rules.
- A full outline of finances and personal savings associated with the application must be provided.
- A summary of the individual/household's personal finances should be provided detailing any other significant debts, assets of size (financial – savings/pension scheme, housing material/cars).
- Details of any vulnerability – which applies to the taxpayer or someone who is dependent on the taxpayer.

- It should be ensured that all other reasonable and lawful avenues have been followed to reduce the amount (including some bankruptcy arrangements) and that the last option is the Part 13A application.
- That reasonable action has been put in place to prevent a similar application in the future (application for exemption, relief, statutory discount, affordable arrangements approved by a qualified body – CAB or Money Helper)
- Where there are financial difficulties by an individual/family it will be necessary to demonstrate that an effort has been made to receive advice from one of the bodies named above.
- A statement of relevant circumstances is welcome from the candidate or representatives on her behalf.

If the Council's Cabinet has not identified and defined a specific cohort of taxpayers or property eligible to receive a reduction in Council Tax (or Premium) in accordance with this Policy (see Part 10 below), a Panel consisting of the Cabinet Member for Finance, the Head of Finance / Assistant Head of Finance and the Tax Manager will consider individual applications for reductions under Section 13A.

If further details are required the person considering the application may request further details/evidence by letter/email.

Informing decisions

The Council will aim to consider the application and inform the customer of the outcome within 28 days of receipt of the claim and all supporting documents.

If the claim for relief is successful, the award will be made directly by discount applied to the Council Tax bill. This will be confirmed in writing and the Council's decision will include the following:

- The reason for the ruling
- Amount awarded
- Period of award
- Applicant's duty to report any changes in circumstances
- Any conditions attached to the award
- Details of the right to review

If a claim is unsuccessful, this will be confirmed in writing and the Council's decision will include an explanation of how the decision was reached and details of the right to request a review.

Appeal against a decision

There is no statutory right of appeal but if a taxpayer believes there is an unfairness or a deficiency where the internal procedure has not been followed a statement of dissatisfaction can be submitted in writing to the attention of the Head of Finance.

The outcome of this further application will be communicated in writing to the applicant within three months.

8. Duration and Review Period

- Discounts can be awarded for a fixed period or until the end of the financial year.
- Re-applications may be made if circumstances persist.
- Decisions are final, but a review can be requested if new evidence is presented.

9. Funding

All awards to reduce basic Council Tax under Section 13A(1)(c) are funded by the Council and, ultimately, by local taxpayers. The Council will monitor the budget set aside for discretionary discounts.

The cost of an exemption from the Premium (in part or in full) is the loss of an opportunity to raise resources towards the purposes of the Premium.

10. Specific Groups

Previous Cabinet decisions, allow the following reductions in accordance with Section 13A:

- Scheme 3e in the Housing Action Plan which extends the exemption period from paying Council tax on empty properties (main or sole dwelling) giving first time buyers an extra year to carry out essential restoration work before the house can be occupied including cases where the exemption period has already been claimed by the former owners.
- Allow a 50% reduction (25% for a short break Foster Carer) in the Council Tax bills of the main residence of foster carers registered with the Council.

11. Council Tax Premium

This part of the policy outlines the circumstances and criteria in which a property owner can apply for an exemption to the Council Tax premium on long-term empty properties and second homes.

Cyngor Gwynedd's main principles for charging and collecting premiums are to encourage property owners to make use of houses as their main or sole home.

11.1 Definitions

- Long-term vacant property: A dwelling without residents and without furniture for a continuous period of 12 months or more.
- Second home: A dwelling that is substantially furnished but is not the main home for anyone.

FINAL APPROVED

11.2. Statutory and local exemptions

11.2.1 Statutory Exemptions for Empty Properties and Second Homes

The Council Tax (Higher Amounts Exemptions) (Wales) Regulations 2015 set out seven classes of properties that are exempt from the (statutory) premium.

Classes of Dwellings	Definition	The type of property eligible for the premium exemption
Class 1	Properties that are marketed as for sale – with a time limit of one year	
Class 2	Properties that are marketed as letting – with a time limit of one year	Long Term Empty Homes and Second Homes
Class 3	Annexes forming part of, or being treated as part of, the main dwelling	
Class 4	Property that would be one's sole or main residence if they were not resident in Armed Forces accommodation	
Class 5	Caravan sites and boat moorings.	
Class 6	Properties where there is a planning condition: <ol style="list-style-type: none">suspend occupation for a continuous period of at least 28 days in any period of one year;specifies that the dwelling may only be used for short-term holiday accommodation; orprevents occupation as a person's sole or primary residence.	Second Homes
Class 7	Work-related properties	

Eligibility criteria for the statutory exemptions:

Class 1 – Property on the market for sale

- The property must be for sale at a reasonable price (average price and the length of time similar dwellings are on the market in the local area; whether there are excessive restrictive conditions, such as the price, imposed on the property to prevent its sale).
- Evidence of marketing must be provided, e.g. Advertising on advertising websites (such as Rightmove/Zoopla) or other forms of marketing; An agreement with a real estate agent; Energy Performance Certificate;

Exemption period: up to 12 months

Class 2 – Properties on the market for rent

- The property must be let at a reasonable rent price (average rent and time on the market for a similar property in the local area; whether there are excessive restrictive conditions such as the rent preventing the property from being rented)
- Evidence of marketing must be provided, e.g. Registration Number and landlord's licence (Rent Smart Wales); Agreement with letting agent; Gas safety certificate

Exemption period: up to 12 months

Class 3 – Annexes

- Annexes forming part of the main dwelling – no additional evidence required.

Exclusion period – until a change in circumstances.

Class 4 – Armed Forces

- Dwellings that would be someone's only home if they did not live in armed accommodation.
- Evidence of service must be provided by the Ministry of Defence.

Exemption period – until a change in the individual's circumstances.

Class 5 – occupied caravan sites and boat moorings

Class 6 - dwellings that are vacant because a planning condition prevents people from occupying them permanently or year-round, or states that the property is to be used as holiday accommodation only or prevents the dwelling from being used as a main residence

Class 7 – job-related dwellings

- for an eligible person as set out in Part 1, Class 7 of the guidance.
- the Council may be requesting certain types of evidence (for example an employment agreement, tax returns, pay statement).

11.2.3 Second Homes Local Exemptions Only

The terminology used in Section 12B is not "second homes" or "holiday homes", but "dwellings occupied *periodically*". The Act states that the conditions for a property to be subject to a "second home" Council Tax premium are, "**there is no resident of the dwelling, and the dwelling is substantially furnished**". That is, this property is not anyone's main home, but it has been furnished. The Act does not contain any provision to be able to discriminate on the basis of where the owner lives, or if it is used for holiday purposes.

In that regard, the Council does not anticipate that it would be in a position to allow discretionary exemptions from the Premium to a wide cohort of properties without undermining the reason for introducing the Premium in the first place. (*This may lead to a need to consider it under the provisions of the Subsidy Management Act 2023*).

However, the Council is aware that changes in legislation are something that needs to be kept under constant scrutiny and as such this Policy, in terms of allowing local exemptions from the Premium on second homes, will also be reviewed regularly.

In accordance with Section 66 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, a property which is intended to be let as self-catering holiday accommodation for at least 252 days in the next year, and has been let for 182 days in the previous year, is a non-domestic property for taxation purposes and therefore appears on the non-domestic rates list rather than in a Council Tax band. The threshold for letting was increased due to pressure from a number of public bodies, with Cyngor Gwynedd leading the way.

Any application for an exemption or reduction from this Premium will need to be able to demonstrate why its position is truly exceptional, and that the imposition of the Premium contravenes Government guidance on the setting of the Premium. A transfer of a property from the non-domestic rates list to a Council Tax band will not in itself be sufficient for a case to be exceptional – it will have to be shown what makes that particular situation unique.

This Policy allows officers to take action to grant an optional exemption from the Premium where the taxpayer is a recognised Community Enterprise with clear objectives of supporting the local community. In order to qualify, the Enterprise will need to share its articles / constitution with the Tax Service in order to satisfy Cyngor Gwynedd that the Menter meets the strict conditions in this paragraph. A ruling on this matter will be made by the Panel which consists of the Cabinet Member for Finance, Head of Finance / Assistant Head of Finance and the Tax Manager.

11.2.4 Empty Property Local Exemptions Only

Local Class A Exemption – Significant renovation of a property (2 Groups)

Group 1 - For the purposes of scheme 3e in the Housing Action Plan this exemption applies to first time buyers only.

First-time buyers will be exempt from council tax and premium for 12 months; after the end of the period of the Class A Council Tax Exemption.

Group 2 – Owners seeking access to their prospective main or sole home.

These owners get up to a further 12 months of exemption to the premium only; after the end of the period of the Class A Council Tax Exemption.

Eligibility criteria:

- The new owner must submit a detailed schedule of work and evidence of structural work (not minor work such as installing a new kitchen)

The exemption ends when:

- The work has been completed
- The property is occupied
- The deadline is coming

12. Fraud

Any application under Section 13A that is dishonest, or intentionally incomplete will be construed as fraud, with a file being provided and transferred to Cyngor Gwynedd's Legal Department with regard to whether there are grounds for prosecution.

A statement of honesty will be part of all applications under Part 13A.

Should there be a case of fraud and an amount has been deleted/reduced this action will be reversed with the amount becoming back payable.

Assessing the Impact on Protected Characteristics, the Welsh Language and Socio-Economic Disadvantage

For help to complete this form see the *How to Undertake an Equality Impact Assessment* leaflet. You are also welcome to contact Delyth Gadlys Williams, Policy and Equality Officer on ext. 32708 or DelythGadlysWilliams@gwynedd.llyw.cymru for further assistance.

The Council's is required (under the Equality Act 2010) to consider the effect any change in policy or procedure (or the creation of a new policy or procedure), has on people with protected equality characteristics. The Council also has a general duty to ensure fairness and foster good relations. A timely Equality Impact Assessment must be undertaken before making any decision on any relevant change (i.e. which has an effect on people with protected characteristics).

The Council is also required, under the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards (Section 44 of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011) to consider the effect of a change in any policy or procedure (or the creation of a new policy or procedure), in its opportunities for people to use Welsh and to ensure that Welsh is not treated less favourably than English. This document therefore ensures that these decisions protect and promote the use of the Welsh language.

From April 1st 2021 the Council has a duty to have due regard to tackling socio-economic disadvantage in strategic decisions.

I) Details

I.1. What is the name of the policy / service in question?

Council Tax Reduction Policy under Section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992

I.2 What is the purpose of the policy / service that is being created or amended? What changes are being considered?

This policy sets out the criteria and process for awarding a discretionary reduction to Council Tax under Section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992. Its aim is to offer support to residents who are facing exceptional financial hardship or unusual circumstances.

The policy allows the Council to reduce or eliminate Council Tax in cases of:

- Individuals experiencing temporary financial hardship.
- Vulnerable groups (e.g. young people leaving care, victims of domestic abuse).
- Cases where the liability to pay Council Tax arises due to unforeseen or exceptional events.
- Any other groups defined by the Council's Cabinet to facilitate the realisation of the

- authority's objectives.
- Specific cases where there is an exemption from the Council Tax Premium, but not basic Council Tax, in addition to the statutory exemptions outlined in legislation.

I.3 Who is responsible for this assessment?

Dewi Morgan, Head of Finance

I.4 When did you commence the assessment? Which version is this?

This Policy is new to ensure clarity around discretionary reduction to Council Tax in accordance with Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

The Policy will be submitted to Cabinet for approval on 11 November 2025.

2) Action

2.1 Who are the stakeholders or partners you need to work with to undertake this assessment?

The key partners and stakeholders were:

Gwynedd Residents

Taxpayers on empty properties and second homes

There have been collaborations with a number of internal partners, e.g.:

Finance Department

Housing and Property Department

Corporate Services Department

Adult, Health and Well-being Department

Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet Members

Cyngor Gwynedd Members

We have also used the public consultation on the Council Tax Premium in 2022 and the updated research work on the impact of the premium by the Research and Information Service in November 2025.

2.2 What measures have you taken to engage with people with equality characteristics, regarding the Welsh language or with communities (either of place or of need) that live with socio-economic disadvantage?

We have consulted with a number of Cyngor Gwynedd's Elected Members as well as Gwynedd taxpayers over the past few years as we have received, assessed and discussed a number of complaints and requests for exemptions to Council Tax and Premium bills.

In addition, we have used the public consultation on Council Tax Premium. That was a public consultation and the questionnaire was available for anyone to complete online. Two press releases were issued raising awareness of it, and social media was used to raise awareness.

The Council wrote to all households subject to the Premium with a letter drawing their attention to the consultation. Where the different correspondence address was recorded in the Council Tax system, this was used. The letter referred to the Council's website and the opportunity to complete the questionnaire there, but the Council's website stated that anyone could contact the Council if they wished to receive a paper copy of the consultation.

The public consultation on Council Tax Premium asked respondents to inform us of any protected features and these have been taken into account in the development of the Council Tax Reduction Policy under Section 13A.

2.3 What was the result of the engagement?

A public consultation was held between 30 September and 28 October 2022. 7,330 responses were received on the formal questionnaire, as well as around 100 separate letters and messages expressing dissatisfaction with the proposal. There were 7,277 online questionnaire responses and 53 paper responses. This is the largest number of responses the Council has seen to any consultation in recent years.

Just over half of respondents (50.3%, N=3,684) owned either a second home or a long-term empty dwelling in Gwynedd (or both).

In total, three-quarters of respondents (75.0%, N=5,497) considered it not appropriate to increase the level of Council Tax Premium on second homes. 24.1% (N=1,764) thought it was appropriate to increase it, with 0.9% (N=69) not having an opinion. However, by separating the answers between respondents who own a second home and those who do not, there is some difference of opinion with the overwhelming majority of respondents who own a second home opposing increasing the premium level. Among respondents who do not own a second home the view was more divided, but with this majority also of the opinion that it would not be appropriate to increase the premium.

Respondents' comments were sought on the impact of the Premium on a number of aspects of social issues. A number of those who opposed the increase indicated that they had owned their property in Gwynedd for several years and were very fond of the area. On the other hand, some of those responding claimed that there was a racist motive behind the intention to increase the Premium as the Council is against people from outside Gwynedd and that it is racist. No evidence was submitted to support this view.

There are two different categories of properties subject to the Premium, namely second homes and long-term empty properties.

Very few people want to pay more tax, and there was vehement opposition from second home owners in particular. It stands to reason that increasing the level of premium would have a financial impact on these individuals, but there was no evidence that any protected group would be affected. However, a number of those who have responded to the enquiry claim that the policy of raising the Premium is racist, anti-English, although no discrimination exists when setting the premium.

The consultation included an equality questionnaire. This suggested that a higher proportion of second home owners than the general population are older people.

2.4 On the basis of what other evidence are you operating?

Section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, gives the Council additional discretionary powers to reduce the amount of Council Tax payable for individuals, or for classes of taxpayers. A policy is needed in place to give officers clear guidance and boundaries on the use of these powers.

The evidence we have received shows that a year allowed under Class A Local Exception to renew a property is no longer sufficient, with many taxpayers in situations where the Council Tax Premium is payable before they can move into the property. This in turn puts additional financial pressure on the taxpayers on top of the significant costs they have in renovating the property. As a result, the Policy allows an additional 12 months exemption to the premium for owners seeking access to their primary or sole home.

A second home is defined by the Act as a property that is not a primary home for anyone, but has been furnished, and does not contain any provision to be able to discriminate on the basis of where the owner lives, or if it is used for holiday purposes. Although we have received a number of complaints from second home taxpayers, the Council is not in a position to allow discretionary exemptions from the Premium to a wide cohort of properties without undermining the reason for introducing the Premium in the first place. So on this basis, the policy does not offer a specific exemption for second homes, but it does allow anyone to apply for an exemption or reduction from the Premium if they can demonstrate why their situation is truly exceptional, and that the setting of the Premium contravenes Government guidance on setting the Premium. The evidence we have shows that the number of taxpayers objecting to the premium, are taxpayers who have not met the criteria in Section 66 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 of 252/182 days and have therefore transferred from the non-domestic rates list where taxes were not payable, to the Council Tax band where they are required to pay the basic council tax and 150% of the council tax premium. This in itself is not sufficient for a case to be exceptional.

The evidence we have also states the need to assess the unique situations of Community Enterprises and the impact that Council Tax Premium has on them to operate successfully. The policy recognises this and gives them the opportunity to bring their individual cases to the panel for consideration.

2.5 Are there any gaps in the evidence that needs to be collected?

No, there are no gaps in the evidence.

3) Identifying the Impact

3.1 The Council must give due regard to the effect any changes will have on people with the equality characteristics noted below. What impact will the new policy/service or the proposed changes in the policy or service have on people with these characteristics?

Characteristics	What type of impact?*	In what way? What is the evidence?
Race (including nationality)	Positive Negative	<p>The policy is intended to provide support to residents facing exceptional financial hardship or unusual circumstances and the impact is positive on this cohort.</p> <p>The policy does not allow optional exemptions from the Premium for second homes, but recognises that it needs to be reviewed regularly to coincide with a change in legislation. The policy may affect people from outside Gwynedd and some respondents to the public consultation on the Council Tax Premium claimed that the Premium would be racist as it targeted people from outside Wales. However, there is no consideration of the race of the property owners when a premium is charged on second homes and long-term vacant properties.</p> <p>The Premium is charged on all second homes and long-term vacant properties without discrimination in any way on where the owners live or what their race or nationality is. However, we recognise that the public consultation shows that a significant proportion of second home owners identify themselves as English and therefore it is likely that the policy will have a negative financial impact on this cohort. However, the policy allows anyone to apply for an exemption or reduction from the Premium if they are able to demonstrate why their situation is truly exceptional.</p>
Disability	Positive	<p>There is a small possibility of differentiation indirectly on the grounds of disability if a disabled person keeps an adapted property in Gwynedd as they cannot have a holiday elsewhere. However, the policy allows anyone to apply for an exemption or reduction from the Premium if they are able to demonstrate why their situation is truly exceptional.</p>

Sex	None	No impact has been identified
Age	Positive	<p>The policy applies to residents who are facing exceptional financial hardship or unusual circumstances and residents who are in this type of circumstances may fall into all of the age categories. Therefore, the policy can have a positive impact on people of all ages in our communities.</p> <p>The policy offers a year's extra exemption from Council tax and the Premium for first-time buyers to carry out vital restoration work – this is likely to have a positive impact most often on the young people of our society. Also, by giving owners seeking access to their main or only home an additional year of exemption from the Premium it extends the support to people of all ages in our communities.</p>
Sexual orientation	None	No impact has been identified
Religion or belief (or non-belief)	None	No impact has been identified
Gender reassignment	None	No impact has been identified
Pregnancy and maternity	None	No impact has been identified
Marriage and civil partnership	None	No impact has been identified
The Welsh language	Positive	<p>The "Empty Property Local Exemptions" section of the policy provides an additional 12 month exemption from Council Tax and Premium (first time buyers) and a 12 month exemption from the Premium only (owners seeking access to their prospective main or sole home) where a significant renovation is carried out to the property. The policy therefore gives families living in Gwynedd the right to receive these exemptions and assists local families to stay in the area and renovate housing.</p>
Socio-Economic Disadvantage	Positive	<p>In establishing the Council Tax Premium in Gwynedd, the principle that the Council was eager for residents to have homes in their own communities was emphasised, in order to ensure thriving communities. It was added that housing was a priority and that it was a requirement to ensure</p>

		<p>additional resources in order to implement the Housing Strategy.</p> <p>The Council Tax Reduction Policy offers support to those facing financial hardship as well as other groups of the community including vulnerable ones.</p>
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3.2 The Council has a duty under the 2010 Equality Act to contribute positively to a fairer society by promoting equality and good relations in its activities regarding the following characteristics – age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, race, gender reassignment, disability and pregnancy and maternity. The Council must give due attention to the way any change affects these duties.

General Duties of the Equality Act	Does it have an impact?*	In what way? What is the evidence?
Abolishing illegal discrimination, harassment and victimisation	No	
Promoting equal opportunities	Yes	Promote equal opportunities by identifying and defining a specific cohort of taxpayers or properties eligible for a reduction in Council Tax (or Premium). It can provide support to vulnerable groups within our communities including groups suffering from financial hardship or exceptional circumstances.
Encouraging good relationships	Yes	The policy can promote good relationships with Gwynedd taxpayers by reducing Council Tax for individuals experiencing financial hardship or those in unexpected or exceptional circumstances. It can also allow exemptions from the Council Tax Premium in addition to statutory exemptions set out in legislation.

3.3 How does your proposal ensure that you work in accordance with the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards (Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011), to ensure that the Welsh language is not treated less favourably than English and that you seize every opportunity to promote the Welsh language (beyond providing services bilingually) and increase opportunities to use and learn the language in the community?

As set out in 3.1 above, it will have a positive impact on our communities as it entitles families living in Gwynedd to receive Council Tax and Premium exemptions and therefore assists local families to stay in the area and renovate housing.

3.4 What other measures or changes could you include to strengthen or change the policy / practice in order to have a positive impact on people's opportunities to use the Welsh language, and to reduce or prevent any adverse effects that the policy / practice may have on the Welsh language?

This is a taxation policy, and we believe that the current policy goes to the best of our legal and statutory ability in that regard in terms of having a positive impact on the language.

3.5 How does the proposal show that you have had due regard to the need to address inequality caused by socio-economic disadvantage? (Note that this is about closing inequality gaps rather than just improving outcomes for everyone)?

The policy covers a number of different cases that will affect a range of residents in our society:-

- Individuals experiencing temporary financial hardship.
- Vulnerable groups.
- Cases where the liability to pay Council Tax and Premium arises due to unforeseen or exceptional events.

It also specifically refers to first-time buyers, owners seeking access to their prospective primary or sole home, foster carers and community enterprises.

3.6 What other measures or changes might you include to strengthen or change the policy / practice to show that you have had due regard to the need to reduce disproportionate outcomes as a result of socio-economic disadvantage, in accordance with the Socio-Economic Act?

We believe that the policy already shows a total commitment to giving due regard to the need to reduce unequal outcomes as a result of socio-economic disadvantage and that other measures or changes are not needed.

4) Analysing the Results

4.1 Is the policy therefore likely to have a significant, positive impact on any of the above and what is the reason for this?

Residents facing exceptional financial hardship or unusual circumstances will fall into all of the age categories, so the policy is having a positive impact on people of all ages in our communities.

The "Local Empty Property Exemptions" part of the policy applies to first time buyers and to property owners seeking access to their prospective main or sole home and therefore gives families living in Gwynedd the right to receive exemptions assisting local families to stay in the area and renovate housing.

4.2 Is the policy therefore likely to have a significant, negative impact on any of the above and what is the reason for this?

No, while the policy does not allow optional exemptions from the Premium for second homes, it recognises that it needs to be reviewed regularly to coincide with a change in legislation. It also allows anyone to apply for an exemption or reduction from the Premium if they can demonstrate why their situation is truly exceptional.

4.3 What should be done?

Choose one of the following:

Continue with the policy / service as it is robust	
Adapt the policy to delete any barriers	
Suspend and delete the policy as the detrimental impacts are too big	
Continue with the policy as any detrimental impact can be justified	✓
No further action at this time because it is too soon to decide, or there is insufficient evidence	

4.4 If continuing with the project, what steps will you take to reduce or mitigate any negative impacts?

- Accessible forms (Braille, large print, simple language).
- Phone line support.
- Reference to Citizens Advice.
- Train staff on the policy including awareness of protected needs.

- A Panel consisting of the Cabinet Member for Finance, Head of Finance / Assistant Head of Finance and the Tax Manager will consider individual applications for reductions under Section 13A.

4.5 If you are not taking any further action to delete or reduce the negative impacts, explain why here.

5) Monitoring

5.1 What steps will you take to monitor the impact and effectiveness of the policy or service (action plan)?

- Collect data on applications by protected characteristics where possible.
- Monitor the impact and complaints.
- Review the policy annually.

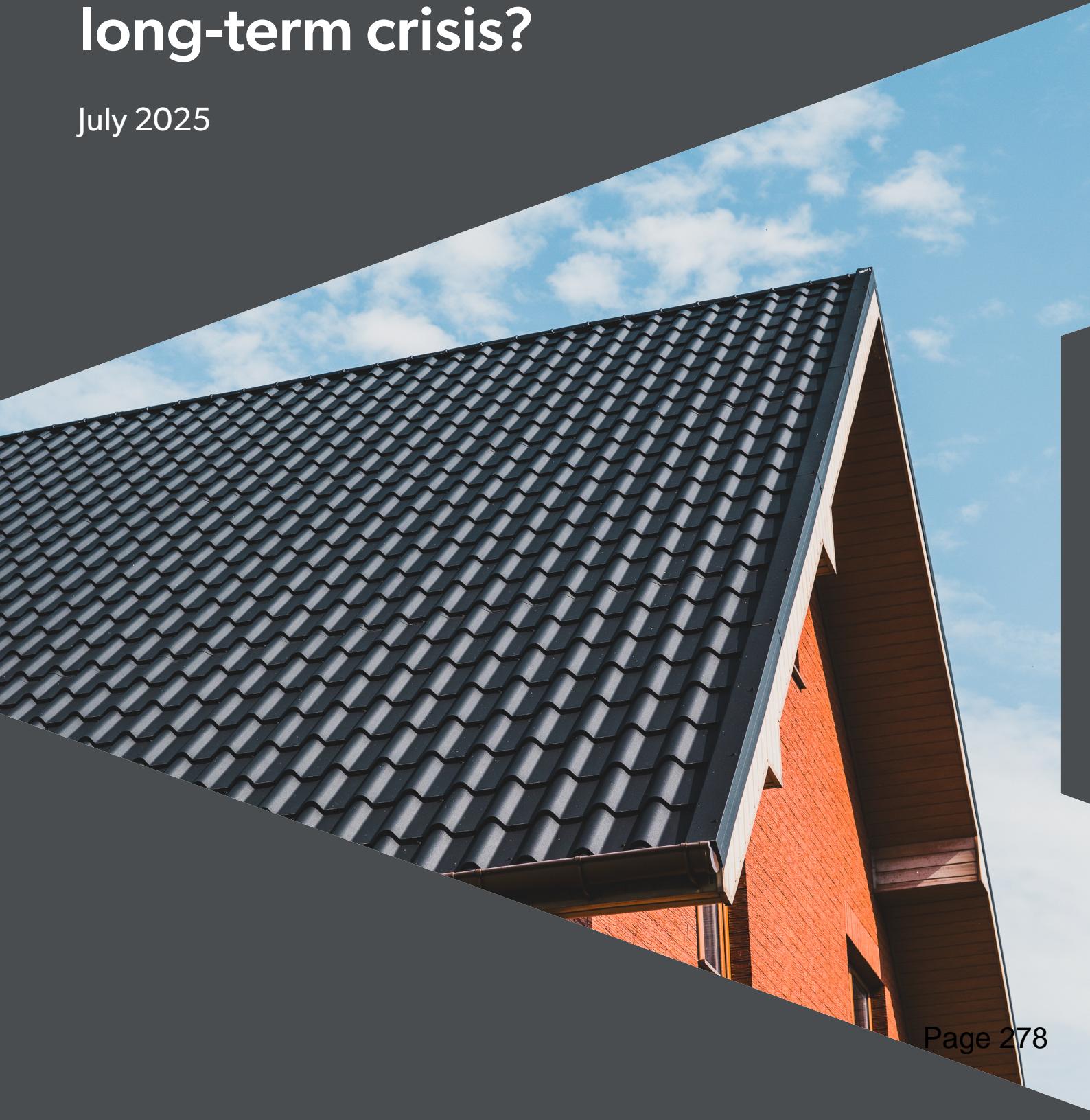
MEETING	Governance and Audit Committee
DATE	15 January 2026
TITLE	Audit Wales Reports
PURPOSE	Provide an update to the Committee on reports recently published by Audit Wales – Temporary accommodation, long-term crisis?
RECOMMENDATION	Members are asked to accept the reports.
AUTHOR	Lora Williams, Audit Lead, Audit Wales Dewi W. Jones, Council Business Support Service Manager

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. The Audit and Governance Committee has a role to review and assess the risk management, internal control, performance management and corporate governance arrangements of the Council and as part of this role there is an expectation to consider the reports of external review bodies such as Audit Wales, Estyn and Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW).
- 1.2. As well as actively considering reports the committee are expected to assure themselves that there are arrangements in place to monitor and evaluate progress against any recommendations contained in them.
- 1.3. A copy of the national report published by Audit Wales on 'Temporary accommodation, long-term crisis?' is included as **Appendix 1**. An organisational response document is included in **Appendix 2** which outlines what we as a Council propose to do in response to the recommendations within the report. An **Officer from the Housing and Property Department** will attend the meeting to respond to any questions if necessary.

Temporary accommodation, long-term crisis?

July 2025



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Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg

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Summary report

Audit Snapshot

Why we did the audit

- 1 This audit was carried out to identify opportunities to improve the value for money of councils' approaches in responding to the demand for temporary accommodation. We also aimed to explain the cost and increase in demand for temporary accommodation and councils' plans to deal with these challenges. In addition, we set out to provide assurance on how public money is being spent to tackle the need for temporary accommodation and provide evidence on where change is needed.
- 2 In particular, we looked at how councils measure, and try to improve, the value for money of what they spend on temporary accommodation. We also looked at whether councils are adapting to a preventative approach by better equipping their workforce, working with partner organisations and improving their understanding of demand for temporary accommodation.

Temporary accommodation

- 3 Demand for temporary accommodation has increased almost five-fold in the last decade. A significant reason for this was the Welsh Government's 'no-one left out' approach which was adopted during the pandemic to ensure everyone had access to a safe place to live. The Welsh Government provided additional funding to councils to implement this policy. Due to continued high levels of demand and rising costs, councils are spending considerable amounts of money providing accommodation for people who are often in crisis.
- 4 Reducing demand for temporary accommodation is important for councils' future financial sustainability. It is also important to ensure they are able to provide the right support for often vulnerable people to help them towards better outcomes.
- 5 Where councils need to provide temporary accommodation, it is important that councils understand whether or not they are securing value for money. This means having an understanding of the both the cost and quality of provision. It also includes understanding whether they are providing people experiencing homelessness with a place to live which meets their needs, even if it is only a temporary home.

6 Even with a focus on prevention, councils are likely to always need to offer a small amount of temporary accommodation for people who are experiencing homelessness. However, if councils and their partners do not reduce demand for temporary accommodation, there remains a risk that short-term solutions become a long-term crisis both for public finances and for people experiencing homelessness.

What we found

7 We found that councils:

- are spending considerable amounts of money on temporary accommodation which in many cases does not meet people's needs;
- do not understand whether they are getting value for money from their temporary accommodation;
- have made limited progress with improving prevention of homelessness to achieve better outcomes and reduce costs;
- find it difficult to predict demand for temporary accommodation in the medium to long term;
- do not have clear plans in place to ensure their workforce is equipped to prevent demand for temporary accommodation; and
- find it difficult to work well with partner organisations to prevent homelessness.

Focus of our recommendations

8 To support councils in overcoming these challenges, we have made recommendations aimed both at improving the value for money of temporary accommodation and reducing demand by preventing homelessness. These recommendations include:

- defining and evaluating value for money;
- strengthening the planning of homelessness prevention through better use of data; and
- modelling the impact of policy and legislation changes on councils' workforce needs.

Key facts and figures

- 9 The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 sets out the legislative framework governing housing and homelessness services. The Act outlines the requirements for councils to secure suitable accommodation for a person who is homeless or threatened to be homeless within 56 days.
- 10 Section 68 of the Act requires councils to provide interim accommodation ('temporary accommodation') if they believe a person is homeless, eligible for assistance and has a priority need for accommodation.
- 11 Temporary accommodation is often in the form of bed and breakfast (B&Bs), hotels, hostels or refuges, while a council undertakes investigations into eligibility (priority need, intentionality and local connection tests) or seeks to secure suitable accommodation.
- 12 The Welsh Government's 'Ending Homelessness in Wales: A high level action plan 2021-2026'¹ sets out key components to ensure homelessness is rare, brief and unrepeatable.
- 13 The Welsh Government introduced the Homelessness and Social Housing Allocation (Wales) Bill to the Senedd on 19 May 2025². The Bill aims to 'transform the homelessness system in Wales' and includes a focus on prevention and collaboration between public services, including a widening of responsibility for the identification and prevention of homelessness.
- 14 The Welsh Government has allocated significant investment to this area, including allocating £219.5 million to Homelessness Support and Prevention for 2025-26³.
- 15 Demand for temporary accommodation is significantly outpacing available accommodation. This is shown in **Exhibit 1**, which compares the number of people in temporary accommodation in a given month with the number of people moved into suitable long-term accommodation in that month, between August 2020 and March 2025.

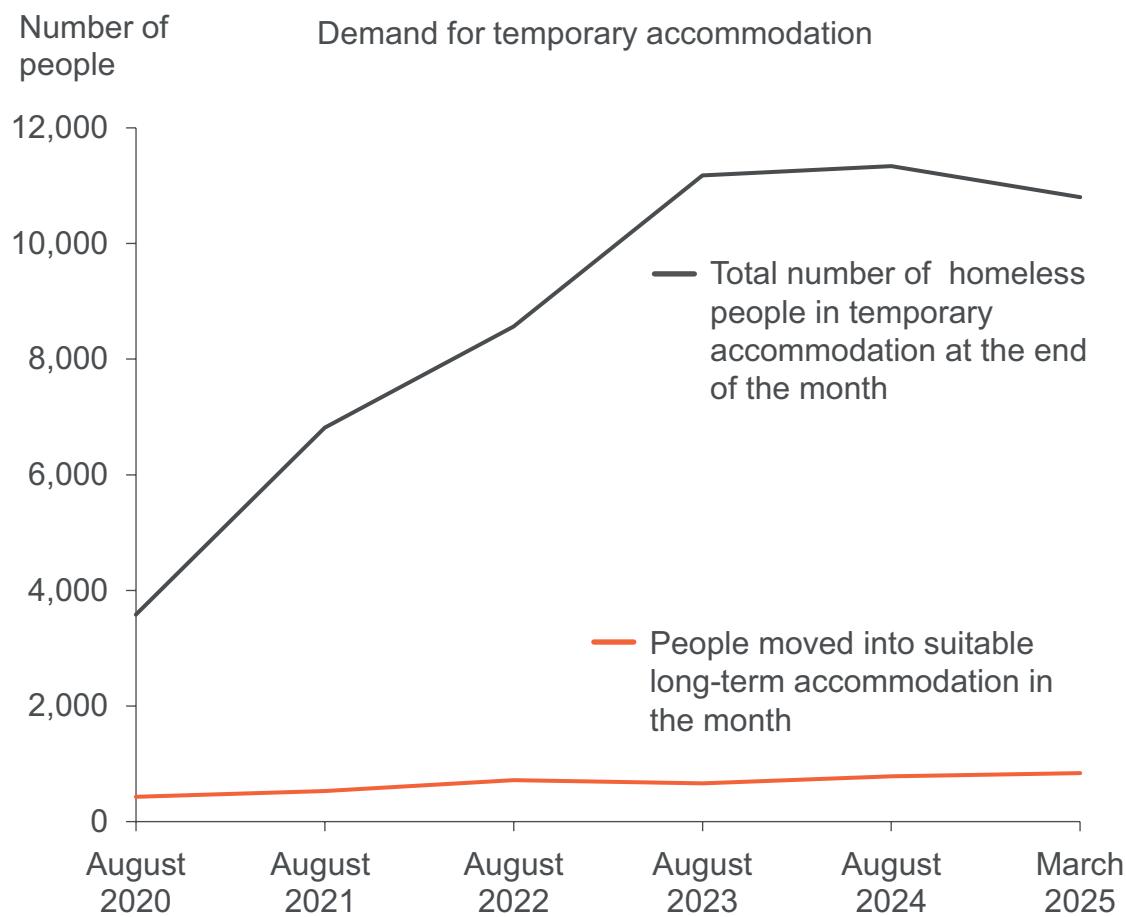
1 Welsh Government, [Ending Homelessness in Wales: a high-level action plan 2021-26](#)

2 Welsh Government, [Landmark Bill sets bold vision for ending homelessness in Wales](#)

3 Welsh Government, [Final Budget 2025 to 2026](#)

Exhibit 1: demand for temporary accommodation in Wales versus availability of suitable long-term accommodation from August 2020 to March 2025

The graph below shows the total number of homeless people in temporary accommodation over time compared with the number of people moved into suitable long-term accommodation between August 2020 and March 2025.



Source: The Welsh Government

Accessed 11 June 2025. Data in this series only available until March, hence the interval between this and the previous data point is seven months. The Welsh Government has told us that monthly data collection was introduced during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic initially as Management Information. From January 2024, these data have undergone the appropriate quality assurance protocols for Official Statistics. Following the introduction of this collection, the Welsh Government worked with local authorities to develop the publication by strengthening the data collection guidance and to improve data quality. Due to this development, there was an improvement in data quality from April 2023. Month-to-month comparisons may not be reliable as there may be seasonal impacts on homelessness or other reasons for fluctuations.

- 16 In March 2025, 10,800 people were in temporary accommodation which represents a 200% increase since collection of this dataset started in August 2020. Of the people in temporary accommodation in March 2025, 24% were children under sixteen years of age⁴.
- 17 Repeat placements in temporary accommodation are common. In March 2025, almost 17% of placements into temporary accommodation were of individuals who had previously been placed into temporary accommodation within the last 12 months⁵.
- 18 There are many complex reasons for the increased demand for temporary accommodation. Some of these are illustrated in **Exhibit 2**.

Exhibit 2: Some of the drivers of demand for temporary accommodation

This exhibit illustrates some of the reasons why demand for temporary accommodation has increased in recent years.

Increased demand for temporary accommodation



Source: Audit Wales analysis

- 4 The information on data quality outlined in the source for **Exhibit 1** also applies to the data in this paragraph.
- 5 The information on data quality outlined in the source for **Exhibit 1** also applies to the data in this paragraph.

19 This rapid increase in demand for temporary accommodation has led to a significant increase in the amount councils spend on providing temporary accommodation. In 2019, councils spent around £28 million in total, whereas in 2023-24, this had increased to nearly £172 million⁶.

6 Source: Audit Wales survey data

We asked councils to provide figures for gross revenue expenditure on temporary accommodation for the financial years 2019-20 to 2023-24. We asked councils to exclude spending on preventative activity. There may be variations in how councils account for temporary accommodation expenditure and so these figures may include some funding from the Welsh Government.

Our findings

Councils spend a lot of money on temporary accommodation which is often not meeting people's needs

- 20 Stays in temporary accommodation are intended to be short, but increases in demand and lack of accommodation have led to people living in temporary accommodation for longer periods.
- 21 The Welsh Government has set out its aim for homelessness to be brief, rare and unrepeatable⁷. To achieve this, the Welsh Government aims to focus on provision of long-term housing solutions to avoid prolonged stays in temporary accommodation.
- 22 There is likely to be a continued use of relatively high levels of temporary accommodation in the short to medium term, due to the difference between current levels of demand and suitable permanent accommodation. This includes people staying in temporary accommodation for longer periods whilst suitable accommodation becomes available. It is therefore important to ensure that temporary accommodation can support people's needs and well-being.

Temporary accommodation often does not meet people's needs and can cause harm

- 23 Living in temporary accommodation can have a significant impact on people's health and well-being. Current provision often does not meet the needs of people including, in particular, groups who share protected characteristics as well as children and young people⁸.
- 24 The Bevan Foundation and Shelter Cymru's report 'Nowhere to call home: Living in temporary accommodation' highlights the experiences of people living in temporary accommodation. The report outlines that living in temporary accommodation can worsen people's mental health due to a range of reasons. These include poor quality accommodation, personal safety concerns, restrictions, abrupt moves and being placed far away from local networks and services such as schools.

⁷ Welsh Government, Ending Homelessness: A high level action plan 2021-2026

⁸ Tai Pawb, Understanding the experiences of homelessness

- 25 A 2023 study by The Reach Alliance⁹ found that living in temporary accommodation hinders children's ability to play, through, for example, a lack of physical space and strict visitor policies that mean children cannot invite their friends over to play.
- 26 Our fieldwork supports the view that in many cases temporary accommodation provision does not meet the needs of residents, can cause harm and is often not fit for purpose.
- 27 We heard of instances where families with young children and people in recovery from drug addiction were living in unsupported temporary accommodation alongside people with active drug addictions. We also heard examples of people developing substance addictions as a result of their temporary accommodation placement.
- 28 Well-being and personal safety concerns have been so significant for some people that they have chosen to become homeless rather than stay in temporary accommodation.
- 29 Councils told us that it is difficult to ensure temporary accommodation can meet a range of people's needs due to a lack of suitable accommodation, particularly for those with more complex needs.
- 30 However, we found some examples of councils taking a more proactive approach to understand the needs of those living in temporary accommodation and to use this to plan provision. We have included several practice examples from page 25 onwards.
- 31 Having a better understanding of the needs of residents and putting in place services to help meet those needs is more likely to improve outcomes for residents and improve value for money.

Councils do not assess the impact that restrictions placed on residents may have on their quality of life

- 32 Due to the lack of suitable accommodation, 19 councils told us that they often put restrictions in place to protect properties and the people living there.
- 33 Examples of restrictions include
 - time curfews, such as residents being unable to enter or leave premises after 10pm each night;
 - limits to the visitors that residents are allowed;
 - bans on use of alcohol;
 - no pets allowed; and
 - no permission for residents to stay away, even to spend a night with family.
- 34 Most councils told us that they assessed the impact these restrictions may have on users. However, we did not find evidence of councils documenting assessments of the impact these restrictions may have.
- 35 Third sector organisations we spoke to told us that the restrictions placed on people have a negative impact on people's lives. Examples included difficulties gaining employment due to time restrictions, the feeling of being imprisoned and feeling watched by CCTV. They also highlighted the significant impacts on children's well-being and development.
- 36 Fully assessing the impact restrictions may have on well-being provides councils with an opportunity to prevent harm by identifying alternative options or arrangements that can better support well-being. This in turn has the potential to help councils secure better value for money by achieving better long-term outcomes for residents.

Councils are spending significant resources on delivering temporary accommodation which is a risk to their financial sustainability

- 37 The total expenditure¹⁰ on temporary accommodation increased by 516% between 2019-20 and 2023-24. This is a rise from £28 million in 2019-20 to £172 million by 2023-24, as can be seen in **Exhibit 3**.

10 Source: Audit Wales survey data.

We asked councils to provide figures for gross revenue expenditure on temporary accommodation for the financial years 2019-20 to 2023-24. These figures may include some funding from the Welsh Government.

Exhibit 3: total expenditure (revenue and capital) for all councils between 2019-20 and 2023-24

This exhibit shows the combined increase in expenditure in cash terms on temporary accommodation for all 22 principal councils in Wales between 2019-20 and 2023-24.



Source: Audit Wales survey of councils

- 38 Councils spent £356 million of revenue and £92 million of capital funding on temporary accommodation from 2019-20 to 2023-24.
- 39 There are a number of reasons why the amount that councils spend on temporary accommodation has increased in recent years. These include increased demand, rising costs, the length of time that residents are staying in accommodation and complexity of their needs.
- 40 Our surveys indicate that councils are concerned current expenditure on temporary accommodation is not sustainable over the medium to longer term, and that it poses a significant risk to their council's overall financial sustainability.
- 41 This suggests that unless a different approach is taken, including more focus on reducing demand, the costs of providing temporary accommodation may become unsustainable.

What we mean by value for money

42 Value for money is about whether money is being used to deliver intended outcomes at the best price. This is also sometimes referred to as 'cost-effectiveness'. Value for money is commonly associated with the 'three E's' of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. We have summarised these as

- Economy – Getting the right deal – securing the necessary inputs, to help achieve intended outcomes, at the lowest possible cost
- Efficiency – Doing things right – making the most of the inputs to generate outputs designed to achieve intended outcomes
- Effectiveness – Getting the right results – achieving the intended outcomes for the short and longer term

43 Value for money is therefore not just about costs, but about the quality and effectiveness of the service delivered for the money spent. People living in temporary accommodation are often in a vulnerable situation and need support to help them move into stable and appropriate accommodation.

44 Councils have legal duties relating to value for money. The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 places a duty on councils to review the extent to which they are using resources economically, efficiently and effectively¹¹.

45 Councils are also required to act in accordance with the sustainable development principle. As part of this they are required to balance both short and long-term needs when making decisions on the use of their resources. It is therefore important that value for money is also considered over the longer term. For example, the most cost-effective solutions may often be ones that prevent problems from occurring at all, or from getting worse.

Most councils do not fully assess the value for money of their temporary accommodation provision

46 Councils primarily focus on comparison of short-term costs to assess value for money. Our evidence suggests that councils think they have strong arrangements in place to monitor value for money. However, we found that councils generally focus on the cost of provision, but not the outcomes or value it provides.

47 In addition, many councils have not benchmarked the costs of their temporary accommodation provision. Less than a third of councils told us they had undertaken benchmarking of their costs. Without benchmarking the costs of temporary accommodation, it is difficult for councils to know if they are providing value for money and to identify areas where they can improve value for money.

¹¹ Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021

48 Overall, this suggests that there are weaknesses in councils' arrangements to assess and monitor value for money. It also suggests there is a difference between how well councils think they are assessing value for money, and how well this happens in practice. This makes it difficult for councils to know whether the money they are spending is being used cost-effectively and having the intended impact.

Most councils do not fully assess a range of temporary accommodation options

49 Assessment of a range of options for temporary accommodation is an important step in securing value for money. This helps to provide assurance that councils have chosen the option that will provide value for money over the short and long term.

50 We found that most councils do not fully assess a range of options when commissioning temporary accommodation. Most councils either do not assess any alternative options at all or have only compared temporary accommodation costs of one or two options.

51 For example, many councils are trying to increase private rented sector accommodation for use as both temporary and permanent accommodation. We found that councils are often only comparing the costs of private rented sector options against short-term hotel and bed and breakfast temporary accommodation costs, rather than against a range of other potential options. This makes it difficult for councils to know that they have selected the option(s) most likely to secure value for money.

52 Where some councils had considered options in more detail, they were able to identify options that reduced costs and improved quality of provision. For example, Carmarthenshire County Council identified that by utilising buildings no longer needed by the Council or being sold by private landlords, it could improve temporary accommodation quality and deliver significant savings to the council.

53 Councils told us that it is difficult to assess all options because they are grappling with increased complexity and levels of demand within a challenging financial context. Councils regularly have to make immediate decisions to provide accommodation the same day and so it is therefore difficult for them to assess a range of options.

54 There are also barriers outside of councils' control that can make it difficult to identify options. We heard that challenges in meeting the Welsh Housing Quality Standard can make it difficult to create new temporary accommodation through converting existing properties. For example, we heard of an instance of a council not being able to utilise ex-council housing for temporary accommodation due to one bedroom being centimetres too small.

55 We also heard that the local housing allowance rates are a barrier for councils because the rates are significantly lower than market housing rents in most areas. All councils had identified the gap between local housing allowance and market rates as an issue, but most had not undertaken modelling to understand the value for money implications different options may have. The few councils that have used these factors to assess their options have found ways to improve their provision despite these constraints.

56 Without assessing a range of options, councils cannot be assured that they have chosen the best option to secure value for money.

Councils do not have arrangements to ensure that the temporary accommodation they commission from external providers delivers value for money

57 Most councils that buy temporary accommodation on a room or unit basis, (such as from hotels), do not have processes in place to ensure they secure value for money. This is partly because councils often buy rooms ad hoc through 'spot purchasing'.

58 Some councils have been able to significantly reduce the costs of 'spot purchasing' by comparing nightly rates between providers or setting up corporate accounts to access discounts. But council officers described that councils are often at the 'mercy' of providers with regard to costs and quality due to an overall lack of accommodation. This is also supported by our surveys, which highlighted concerns that councils' temporary accommodation does not provide value for money.

59 Some councils hire staff with commercial skills to put in place block booking agreements with providers. The purpose of these agreements is to negotiate rates and reduce the risk of fluctuating costs by putting in place longer-term contracts. However, we heard that there are risks with this approach, as councils are sometimes paying for rooms they do not need.

60 Although the Welsh Government has set out the need to move away from the use of emergency, temporary and hostel services¹², some councils are likely to continue to source temporary accommodation from providers to manage demand in the short to medium term. It is therefore important that councils have arrangements in place to ensure that value for money can be secured when commissioning temporary accommodation providers.

Most councils that own temporary accommodation do not have clear and planned maintenance arrangements

- 61 Of those councils that own temporary accommodation, we found that most do not have clear maintenance arrangements in place to reduce repair costs and improve quality.
- 62 Poor quality accommodation does not deliver value for money because it negatively impacts on people's health and well-being and leads to additional costs. For example, some councils have incurred expensive repair costs and alternative accommodation costs where repairs have led to longer turnaround times between tenancies.
- 63 A few councils have maintenance plans for temporary accommodation and clearly defined responsibilities for responsibilities within the council. For example, Cardiff Council has a stock transformation plan, through which it assesses the quality of all of its accommodation provision and identifies the work required to bring it up to standard.
- 64 Having arrangements in place for maintaining temporary accommodation can help to prevent homelessness and therefore the resulting costs and impact on residents' quality of life.

Councils have made limited progress with improving prevention of homelessness to achieve better outcomes and reduce costs

- 65 The Welsh Government mandated that councils should improve early intervention and prevention, in 'Ending Homelessness in Wales: A high level action plan' in 2021¹³. This included a requirement for councils to develop rapid rehousing transition plans as part of their Housing Support Programme Strategies by the end of 2022.
- 66 We found that all councils are aware of the need to move from a reactive to preventative approach, however, the extent to which they have made progress with this is highly variable and limited overall.

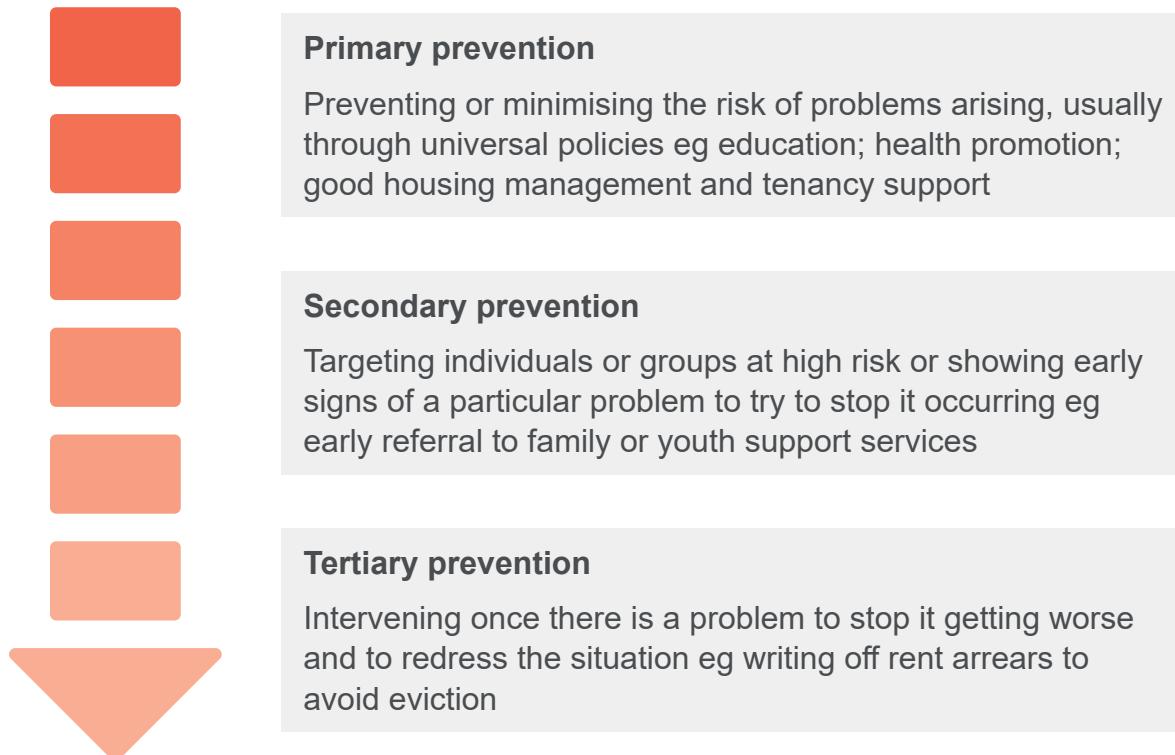
Councils are not planning effectively to prevent demand for homelessness services

- 67 There are three different tiers of homelessness prevention: primary, secondary and tertiary. As shown in **Exhibit 4**, primary prevention is the earliest form of prevention, followed by secondary, and then tertiary. 'Ending Homelessness in Wales' states that 'the earliest preventions are most effective and most cost effective and should always be the interventions of first choice'.

Exhibit 4: the tiers of homelessness prevention

The exhibit below summarises the three tiers of homelessness prevention and provides a summary description of each.

Most effective



Least effective

Source: Audit Wales graphic using text from 'Ending Homelessness in Wales'

- 68 We found that, while all councils have Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans in place, the quality of these plans is variable. Only around half of councils have plans which include primary, secondary and tertiary approaches to prevent demand for temporary accommodation. Other councils mainly include secondary and tertiary approaches in their plans.
- 69 Most councils make good use of data to help them understand barriers to prevention. However, only a few councils and their partners regularly assess how well their prevention approaches are working. Some councils carry out no evaluation at all, and it is not yet clear in most councils if their approaches to prevention have been effective. By not making use of the full range of preventative approaches, councils risk missing opportunities to prevent the need for temporary accommodation at the earliest opportunity and to address costs.

70 For example, Denbighshire County Council has used data to model the impact its plans could have. The Council's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan sets out that investing £2.54 million in key priorities, such as action to reduce demand, could save up to £22 million in private bed and breakfast costs over ten years. This would be a saving of approximately £20 million and equate to a nearly 800% return on investment over that time. Whilst this is an estimate, it does suggest that there are significant cost savings that could be achieved by many, if not all, councils by more effectively planning to prevent demand for temporary accommodation.

Councils find it difficult to predict demand in the long term and many are not confident they will be able to meet that demand

71 To effectively reduce and prevent demand for temporary accommodation, councils will need to improve their understanding of demand for homelessness services, including temporary accommodation. They will also need to improve the way in which they identify people at risk of homelessness.

72 Councils have a good awareness of the drivers of demand for temporary accommodation in the short term, supported by good use of data. But councils find it harder to predict demand in the medium to long term. This was supported by our survey results which showed that councils are generally confident in their ability to predict demand for accommodation over the short term, but less so for the medium term, and even less for the longer term.

73 Over half of councils told us they did not have a fully costed, approved plan in place to resource the projected demand for temporary accommodation over the next three to five years. Many councils told us that they find it difficult to cost their plans for temporary accommodation in the short, medium and long term. This was due to not being able to accurately predict demand or forecast what the costs will be for private providers in the future.

74 Councils are heavily reliant on the Welsh Government's grant funding for delivering action to address temporary accommodation. This poses the risk that councils may struggle to fund temporary accommodation costs if the grant funding is withdrawn.

75 Some councils have undertaken more detailed planning. For example, of the eight councils that clearly had modelled future demand, most had modelled over a medium-term period (five years). Denbighshire County Council used a ten-year period, and Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council has projected demand up to 2037.

76 We recognise that predicting demand is challenging, as demonstrated by recent unforeseeable events such as the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. However, using available evidence and data to try and predict demand can help councils to plan for long-term sustainability. It can also help councils to improve their financial planning for homelessness services and move to a more preventative approach.

Many councils do not have clear plans in place to ensure their workforce is equipped to prevent demand for temporary accommodation

77 Staff in homelessness teams often do difficult and demanding jobs. 'Ending Homelessness in Wales: A high level action plan 2021-2026' includes an action to 'develop a resilient and valued workforce recognised for their expertise'. The aim of this action is to promote the sector as a career and move towards a 'psychologically informed approach' in housing services. To move from a reactive to a preventative model, homelessness teams in councils will need to work in a different way and may require new skills.

78 The Welsh Government's 2024 survey of the housing and homeless workforce found that frontline housing workers in councils more commonly provided neutral or negative responses to the statement 'I am valued for my skills and experience' than frontline workers in other organisations¹⁴. Many respondents to the survey felt workloads and expectations on staff were too high and some raised concerns over how much of the workforce had appropriate skills to implement person centred trauma informed support¹⁵.

79 In response to our survey, 95.5% of councils agreed or strongly agreed that staff in their homelessness teams are under significant pressure and 50% had seen an increase in sickness absences in the homelessness service in the last two years due to workload pressures. Staff abuse, a lack of time to upskill and job satisfaction were given as key staffing challenges. Additionally, 45% of councils told us that they struggle to recruit effectively into their homelessness services and many raised difficulties with recruiting specialist staff.

80 Most councils have taken some action to equip their workforce with the requisite skills and increase capacity, for example, by creating dedicated staff posts to work on prevention and bringing dedicated social workers into housing teams. However, half of councils told us they had not yet modelled the impact of recent and likely future policy changes on the skills and capacity needed in their workforce, nor have they identified their future workforce needs.

14 Welsh Government, Ending Homelessness Outcome Framework: Workforce Survey

15 Welsh Government, Ending Homelessness Outcome Framework: Workforce Survey

81 There has been a rapid increase in demand which has caused councils to focus on responding to this demand in the short term in order to meet their statutory duties. However, without a clear understanding of the future skills and capacity needed, councils risk failing to equip their workforce to work preventatively and being able to reduce demand for temporary accommodation.

Partnership working to prevent homelessness is not always effective or providing value for money and there is limited evaluation of it

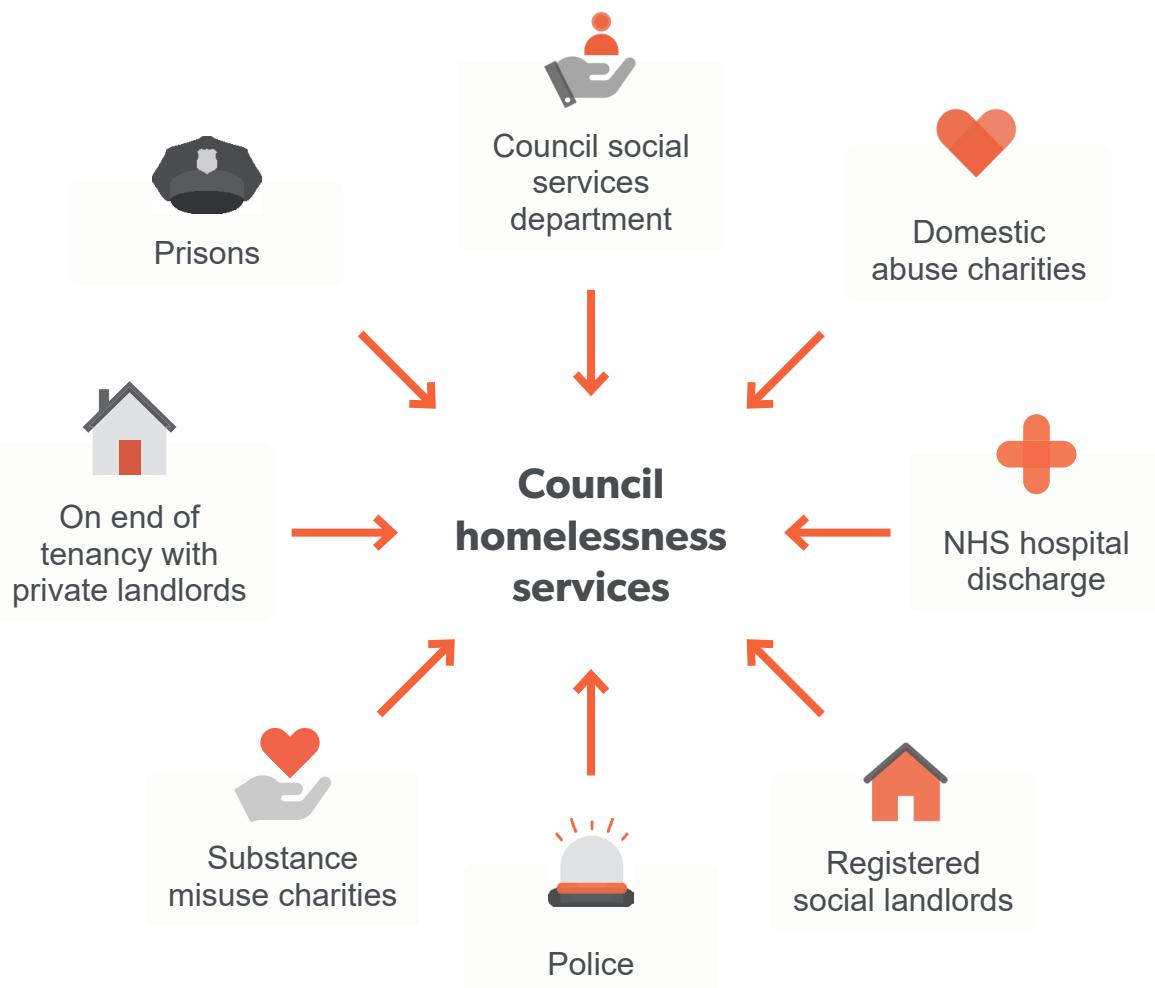
82 There are many routes by which people access homelessness services. For example:

- on leaving prison;
- after hospital discharge;
- due to eviction by their landlord.

83 **Exhibit 5** illustrates more of these routes.

Exhibit 5: some of the routes by which people access homelessness services

The diagram below shows some of the routes by which people access homelessness services.



Source: Audit Wales analysis

84 Therefore, to improve prevention of homelessness, councils need to work with partners such as the prison service, the NHS and private landlords. They also need to work with third sector organisations which provide support, for example, substance misuse charities.

- 85 Generally, councils do not have a comprehensive understanding of which partners they could work with to help reduce homelessness. Responses to our surveys indicate that councils understand which partners they should collaborate with. But our interviews with council officers and document reviews show a more variable picture. Most councils have mapped some aspects of their homelessness service such as the mental health pathway. But they are not fully clear on who does what in preventing demand for temporary accommodation.
- 86 Partnership working is not always effective in reducing the demand for temporary accommodation. Most councils feel they have effective partnership working arrangements in place with key partners to address demand for temporary accommodation. However, our evidence suggests the effectiveness of partnership working is mixed. Many councils have effective partnership working arrangements for some pathways and/or partners, but rarely all. Some council officers also told us that due to pressure on other public services, they often end up 'plugging the gaps'.
- 87 If councils and their partners do not clearly understand their respective roles and responsibilities, there is a risk that services will be duplicated which could potentially waste resources. Or there may be gaps in services, which means councils and their partners could miss opportunities to identify and support people at risk of homelessness.
- 88 There is also limited evaluation of partnership working to prevent demand for homelessness. Only a few councils carry out any significant evaluation of its effectiveness. If councils do not evaluate the effectiveness of partnership working, it is difficult for them to know if they are providing value for money or to identify opportunities to improve homelessness prevention.

Ineffective prevention is reducing value for money in councils and the wider public sector

- 89 Missing opportunities to prevent homelessness and improve well-being for those experiencing homelessness is impacting on people's lives and leading to increased costs for councils. Councils are unlikely to achieve value for money from their temporary accommodation provision until they improve homelessness prevention. This is because preventing homelessness from occurring, or re-occurring is likely to both reduce the cost of providing temporary accommodation and improve outcomes.
- 90 Councils told us that difficulties in engaging with public sector partners is a significant barrier to improving homelessness prevention. This not only means that councils are not able to provide value for money for their homelessness prevention expenditure but also has financial implications for the wider public sector.

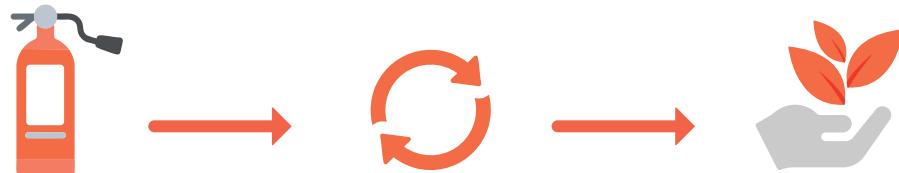
- 91 The Welsh Government commissioned an evaluation of homelessness interventions which included a value for money assessment¹⁶. This assessment found that while cost-benefits for the public sector can vary, a rehousing approach combining stable and suitable housing with the right support had the potential for significant cost avoidance for health, criminal justice, social care and homelessness services.
- 92 The financial benefits of successfully preventing demand for homelessness services and achieving better outcomes for people's lives may not always be seen within one organisation. Not being able to immediately or directly see the impact of money spent can make it difficult for councils and public bodies to invest in prevention or providing greater levels of support. However, there is potential for public bodies to secure better value for money by working together to ensure people have stable and suitable housing.
- 93 The Welsh Government outlined in 'Ending Homelessness' that acute spending to manage the impact of a strongly negative situation does little to prevent problems recurring in future. For example, the potential recurring cost of temporary housing for people who repeatedly experience homelessness or the long-term cost of supporting children who have suffered Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) because of the loss of their home.
- 94 The human cost of homelessness is not quantifiable in the same way as the financial cost, but it clearly has a significant impact. Homelessness can lead to family separation and delays in children's development. It can also have a negative effect on health and wellbeing. A failure to improve prevention of homelessness is likely to cause considerable problems for councils and their communities, both in the short and longer term.

There are approaches that councils could potentially use to improve the current situation

- 95 Current financial challenges and increased demand for temporary accommodation in recent years means that many councils are operating in 'firefighting' mode. This means they are focused on managing demand, delivering statutory duties and providing accommodation in the short-term rather than working to prevent demand over the medium and longer-term. The risks of this approach were highlighted in the Auditor General's report *From Firefighting to Future-proofing – the challenge for Welsh public services*¹⁷. We have summarised this in **Exhibit 6**.
- 96 Unless councils are able to focus more on prevention, alongside a stronger focus on the value for money of current provision, they will continue to provide an expensive service that risks not meeting people's needs.

Exhibit 6 – from firefighting to future proofing

The exhibit below sets out a description and characteristics for the different stages of 'firefighting', 'transition phase' and 'implementing the sustainable development principle' in relation to public services.



Description	Firefighting	Transition phase	Implementing the Sustainable Development Principle
Characteristics observed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decisions and plans are made on an ad hoc and short-term basis. Constantly reacting to demand which diverts resources away from prevention. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Firefighting in some areas but strategic and long-term planning is taking place. Initiatives to prevent demand are being put in place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning for the long term based on an understanding of trends, demand and user needs. Collaborating with partners to share learning and deliver integrated services that support people's well-being. Involving people and partners in service design, evaluation and problem solving to ensure the intended outcomes are achieved in the right way.

Source: Audit Wales diagram informed by an infographic from the National Audit Office's guide [Improving Operational Delivery in Government](#)

97 We have identified practice examples that councils might find helpful to improve their approach to temporary accommodation provision. These have been grouped into four themes below.

Planning and using data

98 Neath Port Talbot Council has undertaken medium-term financial planning in relation to housing and homelessness. This identifies:

- recurring costs;
- forecasted increases in demand including allowance for children transitioning to adulthood placements;
- the investment needed for its transformation programmes;
- cost of homelessness pressures;
- the projected budget shortfall to meet the demand for temporary accommodation; and
- the likely use of reserves is also stated across the full period.

99 Analysis of data has also enabled Neath Port Talbot Council to identify repeat episodes of homelessness and hospital admissions for people owed a statutory aftercare duty due to complex mental health needs¹⁸. The Council has developed a proposal to address this to deliver better support and outcomes for service users.

100 The Chartered Institute of Housing Scotland worked with partners to develop a framework for enabling a more consistent approach to monitoring rapid rehousing transition plans¹⁹. The framework is set out against the aims of homelessness being prevented, brief and non-recurring, and sets out indicators, measures and actions that councils can use to monitor progress in meeting these aims.

101 The Built for Zero²⁰ programme run by Crisis focuses on improving the use of data to understand who is experiencing homelessness, what they need to move into a home and how homelessness changes over time.

18 [Mental Health Act 1983](#)

19 [Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans Report](#)

20 Crisis UK, [Built for Zero: Together we will end homelessness](#)

Understanding and responding to the needs of those living in temporary accommodation

- 102 Carmarthenshire County Council has developed plans for a short-stay accommodation and support centre specifically for young people aged 18 to 25 with complex needs. The centre provides a protected environment where needs can be supported by a multi-agency team for up to six months, while permanent accommodation is found.
- 103 Conwy County Borough Council has developed two shared housing schemes which provide support and accommodation for people who are homeless upon release from prison.
- 104 Conwy County Borough Council has also placed an officer within some of its temporary accommodation to provide support for residents. This includes help with seeking employment and advice on available benefits. We heard that there has been high demand for this service, and it has led to successfully removing barriers that prevented some people accessing employment and, consequently, permanent accommodation.

Partnership

- 105 Homeless Link has created a partnership self-assessment tool²¹. This tool can help to assess current partnership arrangements and identify actions to strengthen arrangements where needed.
- 106 Crisis has developed a Homelessness Alliance²² in partnership with the UK Government. Local businesses can join the alliance by signing and implementing pledges that commit them to preventing their employees becoming homeless. This is designed to encourage local businesses to help prevent homelessness.

Assessing options

- 107 Greater Manchester Combined Authority and the UK Government developed a cost-benefit analysis tool²³ to assess the value for money to the public sector of different intervention options that may not be easy to compare. The tool can help partners work together to better understand the relationship between the money spent by the public sector as a whole and the benefits delivered. The tool is supported by guidance and a unit costs database that provides financial data on a range of public sector activities, including housing, health and social services. The tool can be used to support a better understanding of value for money of different options to meet and prevent demand for temporary accommodation.

21 Homeless Link, [Partnership self assessment framework](#)

22 Crisis UK, [Sign up to our Homelessness Alliance](#)

23 Greater Manchester Combined Authority, [Research: Cost Benefit Analysis](#)

108 Local Partnerships has developed a homelessness prevention model²⁴. The model can be used to help quantify the costs and benefits of homelessness prevention programmes.

109 Denbighshire County Council's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan contains a detailed assessment of options over a ten-year period, including the financial impact per annum. The plan also sets out how the Council's chosen approach to temporary accommodation meets its aim to have accommodation that can be used flexibly as demand changes over time.

110 Neath Port Talbot Council found that it was operating most of its temporary accommodation at a loss. The Council modelled a range of options and identified that it would be more cost-effective to purchase the temporary accommodation it was leasing. This is because the Council identified that it could fully recover its costs within a few years and then be able to invest income generated from rents at local housing allowance rates back into the service.

111 Isle of Anglesey County Council has drawn on The Temporary Housing Dilemma – Strategies for Local Authorities²⁵ report published by Copping Joyce. The report contains a matrix that can help councils to assess the implications of different approaches to providing temporary accommodation.

112 The Hertfordshire Growth Board²⁶ has sponsored a review of temporary accommodation options to assist councils to better meet the housing needs of people living in temporary accommodation whilst securing value for money. Three proposals have been identified to have the highest potential to impact the supply and management of homelessness accommodation:

- development of a Hertfordshire Temporary Accommodation Predictive Model to better understand and manage future demand;
- development of a multi-district or Hertfordshire wide accommodation pathway for homeless people with complex needs (originally a housing first service);
- development or commissioning of hospital stepdown accommodation.

24 Local Partnerships, Homelessness prevention report and tool

25 Copping Joyce Surveyors, The Temporary Housing Dilemma - Strategies for Local Authorities

26 Local Government Association, Joint Review of Temporary Accommodation Provision: how can we improve the availability of appropriate temporary accommodation across the county

113 Success will be measured through:

- measurable improvements in the life chances for households in temporary accommodation;
- increased return on financial investment in provision of temporary accommodation; and
- increased collaboration and shared learning from experience by bringing together the required expertise into one co-ordinated programme.

114 This approach provides an example for how partners can work collaboratively to identify temporary accommodation options.

Increasing accommodation options and improving quality

115 We found examples of innovative solutions being used to try to improve the value for money of temporary accommodation and increase accommodation options:

- Cardiff Council has used modern construction methods to create accommodation on brownfield land. The Yr Hafan²⁷ site has delivered high quality, energy efficient temporary accommodation with support permanently on site and a community building to provide training, education and creche facilities for residents.
- Cardiff Council has a stock transformation plan through which it assesses the quality of all of its accommodation provision and identifies the work required to bring it up to standard.
- Linc Cymu Housing Association has created high quality, energy efficient homes on an underutilised car park for people previously living in temporary accommodation in Newport²⁸.
- Carmarthenshire County Council identified that it could deliver improved quality temporary accommodation to support residents' wellbeing and deliver significant savings to the council by utilising buildings that were no longer needed by the Council or being sold by private landlords.
- When a local landlord decided to sell a large number of homes, Neath Port Talbot Council identified an opportunity to increase social housing stock and prevent homelessness by working with local RSLs to purchase some of the properties. The Council is not stock holding, but collaborative working with the Welsh Government enabled the Council to increase its number of owned properties.

27 Cardiff Council, Hafan (Old Gas Works Site) – Ferry Road, Grangetown

28 Zed Pods, Hill Street House

116 There may be opportunities for some councils to work more with communities and the third sector to expand their provision and provide support to people living in temporary accommodation. Mapping out potential partners could help councils to identify new opportunities or opportunities to work more effectively with the third sector. Examples of initiatives run by the third sector include:

- Many organisations deliver Housing First schemes in Wales, including The Wallich and The Salvation Army. Housing First teams work closely with councils to rapidly find people a permanent home alongside intensive support to sustain their home.
- Depaul runs Nightstop which enables volunteer hosts to provide emergency overnight accommodation to young people.
- Housing Justice Cymru runs programmes such as:
 - Faith in Affordable Housing which brings redundant church land and buildings back into use as social housing;
 - Hosting Project which supports volunteer households to host refugees and asylum seekers; and
 - Citadel is a volunteer-led homelessness prevention project which provides support to people experiencing homelessness to find and/or sustain a tenancy and establish a home.



Our recommendations

Exhibit 7: recommendations

The table below sets out the recommendations that we have identified following this study.

Recommendations

Value for money

R1 We found that councils are not able to demonstrate that they are securing value for money in their temporary accommodation provision. To address this councils should:

- ensure the full range of approaches and options for temporary accommodation provision are considered; and
- set out how they will assess and monitor the overall value for money of temporary accommodation provision, including:
 - the intended outcomes; and
 - the information they will use to assess the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of their temporary accommodation provision.

Recommendations

Planning for prevention

R2 We found that while all councils have Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans in place, these are of variable quality. To effectively plan to prevent homelessness councils should:

- ensure they use relevant data to make the best possible estimate of future demand for homelessness services;
- include a range of primary, secondary and tertiary approaches in their plans, with the emphasis on primary prevention where possible;
- model the impact of policy changes on the skills and capacity needed in their workforce;
- identify the workforce they will need to address demand for temporary accommodation in the future; and
- set out how they will assess and monitor the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of their approach to preventing and reducing demand for temporary accommodation.

Partnership working

R3 We found that partnership working in preventing homelessness is often not effective. To improve this councils should:

- work with their partners to:
 - identify existing respective roles and responsibilities;
 - agree how to address gaps in and/or duplication of services;
- regularly evaluate the effectiveness of their partnership working for homelessness prevention.



Appendices

1 Audit scope, approach and methods

1 Audit scope, approach and methods

Scope

We sought to answer the question ‘Are there opportunities to improve the value for money of temporary accommodation services?’

To answer this, we looked at what councils are doing to ensure they secure value for money in their current approach to providing temporary accommodation. We also looked at whether councils are effectively preventing demand for temporary accommodation services.

We developed our audit criteria based on learning from our previous audits of Homelessness demand²⁹, Rough sleeping³⁰ and Poverty³¹. We also used research from relevant organisations and stakeholders on the key issues around temporary accommodation to inform these criteria.

Approach

Our approach in this audit has been to understand the cost of, and increase in demand for, temporary accommodation and councils’ plans to deal with these challenges. We aimed to identify how public money is being spent to tackle the need for temporary accommodation and provide evidence on where change is needed. We also aimed to support improvement by highlighting opportunities to improve value for money and citing examples of good practice.

We aimed in particular to consider the needs of, and outcomes for, people experiencing homelessness as part of this work.

29 Audit Wales, How Local Government manages demand – Homelessness

30 Audit Wales, Rough Sleeping in Wales – Everyone’s problem; no-one’s responsibility. Audit Wales, July 2020

31 Audit Wales, ‘Time for change’ – Poverty in Wales. Audit Wales, November 2022

Methods

Our fieldwork was completed between September 2024 and April 2025, utilising the following methods:

- document review: we reviewed key documents from all 22 councils. These included rapid rehousing transition plans, progress monitoring reports for rapid rehousing transition plans, and Medium Term Financial Plans. We also reviewed workforce plans, business cases and tender documents to support the commissioning of temporary accommodation. We also reviewed documents that evidenced long-term demand modelling and planning and agreements that underpin key partnerships.
- literature review: we reviewed key relevant policy and research documents.
- local interviews: we met with relevant senior officers and councillors from five councils.
- national interviews: we met the Welsh Government, research organisations and homelessness charities.
- surveys: we carried out surveys of the section 151 officers and heads of housing in all 22 councils. We received responses from all councils for both surveys.



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Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a
galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg.

Management response form



Audit Wales use only	
Audited body	Cyngor Gwynedd
Audit name	Temporary accommodation, long-term crisis?
Issue date	06/08/2025

Ref	Recommendation	Commentary on planned actions	Completion date for planned actions	Responsible officer (title)	Audit Wales Only
R1	<p>Value for Money</p> <p>We found that councils are not able to demonstrate that they are securing value for money in their temporary accommodation provision.</p> <p>To address this councils should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• ensure the full range of approaches and options for temporary	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Homelessness Service has carried out an inspection of all properties used to accommodate households, including their facilities and owners based on Government-defined 'Fit and Proper Person' requirements. <p>As a result of those inspections, recommendations were made for improvements to the property and/or property business arrangements.</p>	Ongoing	Homelessness Manager	

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	<p>accommodation provision are considered; and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set out how they will assess and monitor the overall value for money of temporary accommodation provision, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the intended outcomes; and also - the information they will use to assess the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of their temporary accommodation provision. 	<p>The intention is to continue with the arrangements to carry out these inspections on a regular basis. The Homeless Review (to comply with section 51 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014) will take place during 2025/26 which will surely reinforce the work that has already taken place.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Service will continue to challenge costs on a regular basis, writing to property owners highlighting the emergency accommodation cost situation and setting an acceptable maximum nightly cost. • Following the creation of an internal system for recording and monitoring emergency accommodation bookings and expenditure, we have seen an improvement in the efficiency of our 	<p>Ongoing as required</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Homelessness Manager</p> <p>Homelessness Manager</p>	

Ref	Recommendation	Commentary on planned actions	Completion date for planned actions	Responsible officer (title)	Audit Wales Only
		<p>processes, and have a better overview of our spending. We will continue with these arrangements including setting up weekly meetings between our accountant, finance team and Homelessness Service Manager to monitor expenditure in order to identify patterns and proactively identify solutions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings with the Council's Procurement Unit have been arranged to discuss the situation and emergency accommodation procurement options with the aim of facilitating arrangements and ensuring value for money. • Have and continue to identify suitable properties to buy for the purpose of accommodating homeless individuals e.g. Crown Building, Caernarfon and Tŷ 	<p>September 2026</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Homelessness Manager</p> <p>Assistant Head of Housing and Property</p>	

Ref	Recommendation	Commentary on planned actions	Completion date for planned actions	Responsible officer (title)	Audit Wales Only
		Glyn, Bangor. Our hope is that this will lead to savings and a better standard of accommodation for homeless individuals.			
R2	<p>Planning for Prevention</p> <p>We found that while all councils have Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans in place, these are of variable quality. To effectively plan to prevent homelessness councils should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure they use relevant data to make the best possible estimate of future demand for homelessness services; • include a range of primary, secondary and tertiary approaches in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is unclear whether this is a problem in Gwynedd, and our Rapid Rehousing Plan has been praised by the Government. • We can confirm that the Action Plan of our Rapid Rehousing Plan is currently being reviewed and that progress has been made. <p>As mentioned above, we are embarking on a Homelessness Audit which will eventually form the basis for our Homelessness Strategy. Alongside this we are</p>	End of 2026	Commissioning Team Leader	

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	<p>their plans, with the emphasis on primary prevention where possible;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • model the impact of policy changes on the skills and capacity needed in their workforce; • identify the workforce they will need to address demand for temporary accommodation in the future; and • set out how they will assess and monitor the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of their approach to preventing and reducing demand for temporary accommodation. 	<p>undertaking a Needs Assessment as part of the planning process for the Housing Support Grant which will form the basis of the Housing Support Strategy. According to the latest expectation from the Government, both these strategies will be merged into a single Housing Support and Homelessness Strategy. While the timeline for the rollout of these strategies has been extended to April 2027, we plan to roll out our strategy before the end of 2026.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This Strategy, based on the information identified in the Needs Assessment and Homelessness Review, will consider all options for the provision of homelessness 			

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		<p>prevention services, whether statutory or otherwise.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A rapid rehousing ethos will be woven into the strategy to ensure that those values underpin the strategic direction of the strategy. • In terms of data, a new computer system allows us to get a better overview of a situation and key data. The specification was formulated with data needs in mind, ensuring that our decisions are data-driven. • We have commissioned research from the Council's in-house Research and Analytics Unit to look at presentation patterns with a view to proactively trying to prevent cases. 	<p>March 2026</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	Homelessness Manager	

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have purchased and continue to purchase properties across the county to proactively try to prevent homelessness. • We have identified critical roles in workforce planning and ensured we have staff in place to respond to demand. • Continue to report on levels of homelessness prevention through the Council's internal Performance Challenge and Support procedure. • Established a "Homelessness Group" which reports to the Chief Executive and Cabinet Member. During the meeting, the Council's homelessness situation is reported to highlight efficiency and identify 	September 2025 Ongoing Ongoing	Assistant Head of Housing and Property Head of Housing and Property Head of Housing and Property Head of Housing and Property	

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		key patterns, including preventative work.			
R3	<p>Partnership Working</p> <p>We found that partnership working in preventing homelessness is often not effective. To improve this councils should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work with their partners to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - identify existing respective roles and responsibilities; - agree how to address gaps in and/or duplication of services; • regularly evaluate the effectiveness of their partnership working for homelessness prevention. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Again, it is unclear whether there is evidence of a lack of partnership working in Gwynedd, and WG has recognised the Gwynedd Housing Partnership as an example of good partnership working practice. • However, it is true that there is increasing pressure on every single public area in Wales e.g. probation service, health service, which in turn makes it increasingly difficult for organisations to work in partnership due to conflicting priorities. 	October 2025		

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have asked that this issue be included on the agenda of a meeting between North Wales local authorities and the WG's Housing Minister in October 2025. • Continue to discuss in the Partnership Board Allocation and Lettings sub-group. • Further information is expected following the new Homelessness Bill in light of its recommendations to make partnership working statutory. We are ready to respond when that happens. • As referred to above, the Needs Assessment and Homelessness Review will ensure that there is comprehensive engagement and consultation with partners and 	Ongoing	Head of Housing and Property	
			Ongoing	Assistant Head of Housing and Property	
				Homelessness Manager	

Ref	Recommendation	Commentary on planned actions	Completion date for planned actions	Responsible officer (title)	Audit Wales Only
		<p>stakeholders in the field of homelessness and homelessness prevention. It is anticipated that the Housing and Homelessness Support Strategy will encompass themes of partnership working across the field and will search for opportunities to do so in order to mitigate the impact of homelessness. The content of the strategy will also incorporate the changes brought about by the introduction of the Homelessness and Social Housing Allocation Act where there is an emphasis on partnership working.</p>			

Agenda Item 12

Forward Programme of the Governance and Audit Committee to November 2026

5 February 2026

Implementing the Decisions of the Committee
Half-yearly Risk Report
Review of the Committee's Self-Assessment Work Programme
Internal Audit Output
Internal Audit Plan 2025/26
Savings 2026/27
Capital Strategy 2026/27 (including Investment and Borrowing Strategies)
Budget 2026/27
Internal Audit Strategy and Annual Internal Audit Plan 2026/27
Governance Risks Mid-Year Update
Recommendations And Improvement Proposals of External Audit Reports
Audit Wales Reports - Q3 Update
The Committee's Forward Programme

May 2026

Elect Chair
Elect Deputy Chair
Implementing the Decisions of the Committee
Gwynedd Harbours' Final Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2026
Final Accounts 2025/26 - Revenue Outturn
Capital Programme 2025/26 – End of Year Review (31 March 2026 Position)
Output of the Internal Audit Section
Head of Internal Audit Annual Report 2024/2025
Internal Audit Charter
Audit Wales - Quarter 4 Update
Audit Wales - Cyngor Gwynedd Annual Audit Summary 2025
Audit Wales Reports and Organisational Response
Treasury Management Quarterly Report
The Committee's Forward Programme

September 2026

Implementing the Decisions of the Committee
Annual Report of the Governance and Audit Committee 2025-26
Annual Performance Report and Cyngor Gwynedd Self-Assessment 2024/25
Committee Development Programme
Statement of Accounts 2025/26 (Subject to Audit)
Gwynedd Council's Annual Governance Statement For 2025/26
Treasury Management 2025/26
Half-yearly Risk Report
Medium-Term Financial Plan
Audit Wales Reports - Q1 Update
Annual Performance Report and Cyngor Gwynedd Self-Assessment 2025/26
Recommendations And Improvement Proposals of External Audit Reports
The Council's Arrangements for Dealing with Complaints
The Committee's Forward Programme

October 2026

Implementing the Decisions of the Committee
Final Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2025 and Relevant Audit
Recommendations And Improvement Proposals of External Audit Reports
Revenue Budget 2026/27 – End of August 2026 Review
Capital Programme 2026/27 – End of August 2026 Review
Savings Overview: Progress Report on Realising Savings Schemes
Treasury Management Quarterly Report
Audit Wales Reports
The Committee's Forward Programme

November 2026

Implementing the Decisions of the Committee
Treasury Management 2026-27 Mid-Year Review
Internal Audit Output
Internal Audit Plan 2026/27
Audit Wales Reports
Recommendations And Improvement Proposals of External Audit Reports
The Committee's Forward Programme

February 2027

Implementing the Decisions of the Committee
Review of the Committee's Self-Assessment Work Programme
Revenue Budget 2026/27 – End of November 2026 Review
Capital Programme 2026/27 – End of November 2026 Review
Savings Overview: Progress Report On Realising Savings Schemes
Audit Wales Reports
Half-yearly Risk Report
Review of the Committee's Self-Assessment Work Programme
Internal Audit Output
Internal Audit Plan 2026/27
Savings 2027/28
Capital Strategy 2027/28 (including Investment and Borrowing Strategies)
Budget 2027/28
Internal Audit Strategy and Annual Internal Audit Plan 2027/28
Governance Risks Mid-Year Update
Recommendations And Improvement Proposals of External Audit Reports
The Committee's Forward Programme