
THE COUNCIL 4/12/25

Present: Ioan Thomas (Chair)
Elin Walker Jones (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Craig ab Iago, Menna Baines, Beca Brown, Robert Glyn Daniels, Elwyn Edwards, Alan Jones Evans, Gwilym Evans, Dylan Fernley, Delyth Lloyd Griffiths, Annwen Hughes, John Brynmor Hughes, Louise Hughes, R Medwyn Hughes, Elin Hywel, Nia Wyn Jeffreys, Anne Lloyd-Jones, Berwyn Parry Jones, Dawn Lynne Jones, Dewi Jones, Elwyn Jones, Gwilym Jones, Gareth Tudor Jones, Huw Wyn Jones, June Jones, Eryl Jones-Williams, Olaf Cai Larsen, Beth Lawton, Dafydd Meurig, Dilwyn Morgan, Dewi Owen, Edgar Wyn Owen, Llio Elenid Owen, Geraint Wyn Parry, Nigel Pickavance, Rheinallt Puw, Arwyn Herald Roberts, Beca Roberts, Elfed Powell Roberts, Gareth A Roberts, John Pughe Roberts, Meryl Roberts, Richard Glyn Roberts, Huw Rowlands, Paul John Rowlinson, Angela Russell, Dyfrig Siencyn, Peter Thomas, Menna Trenholme, Rhys Tudur, Hefin Underwood, Einir Wyn Williams, Elfed Williams, Gareth Williams, Gruffydd Williams, Sasha Williams, Sian Williams and Gwion Emyr

Also present:

Dafydd Gibbard (Chief Executive), Dewi Morgan (Head of Finance), Iwan Evans (Monitoring Officer), Dylan Owen (Corporate Director), Catrin Thomas (Corporate Director), Carys Fôn Williams (Head of Housing and Property), Ian Jones (Head of Corporate Services), Aled Gibbard (Interim Head of Children's Department), Nia Grisdale (Legal Services Manager), Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Service Manager) and Annes Sion (Democracy Team Leader).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Elfed Wyn ap Elwyn, Stephen Churchman, Linda Morgan, Dafydd Davies and Jina Gwyrfai.

2. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous Council meeting held on 2 October 2025 as a true record.

3. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

4. THE CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Condolences were expressed to Councillor Anne Lloyd Jones, Glyn Daniels and Delyth Lloyd Griffiths who had all experienced a recent bereavement. It was further noted that the Council wished to express condolences to everyone within the county's communities who had lost loved ones recently. The Council stood in silence as a mark of respect and remembrance.

Councillor Gwion Emyr, the new member for Bethel and Felinheli Ward, was welcomed to his first meeting of the Council.

Elfyn Evans from Dolgellau was congratulated on coming a very close second at the World Rally Championships in Saudi Arabia. As well as Ifan Dafydd from Meirionnydd Harriers who came second in the Eryri Marathon this year.

Congratulations were also expressed to the Magic Lantern Cinema, Tywyn, for winning the award for Cinema of the Year in the British Independent Film Awards recently. Congratulations to them on their success and important contribution to the economy and cultural scene of Tywyn and Meirionnydd.

5. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

6. QUESTIONS

(The Cabinet Members' written responses to the questions had been published in advance.)

Question by Councillor John Pughe Roberts

Given the statutory obligations under the Education Act 2002 (s.175) and Keeping Learners Safe (Welsh Government, 2021), governing bodies must ensure effective safeguarding arrangements, provide robust challenge, and verify that procedures are followed. The Child Practice Review identified significant shortcomings, including:

- inadequate challenge and oversight from governors;
- over-reliance on assurances from senior leaders rather than verification;
- insufficient safeguarding training;
- unclear or delayed communication with the LADO and Local Authority.

In the interests of transparency, accountability and public confidence, I ask the Leader to confirm that no individual connected to these failures is currently serving in her Cabinet?

Response from the Leader of the Council, Councillor Nia Jeffreys

One of the Cabinet Members serves as a governor at Ysgol Friars, and I know that the member wishes to apologise to the victims for the far-reaching impact of the Governing Body's failures, which have been highlighted in the Our Bravery Brought Justice report. As a Cabinet and Council, we fully accept the report. Our responsibility now is to act on all its recommendations and findings. The courage of the victims compels us to act swiftly and decisively.

Members will also be aware that we are currently drafting a new version of our Response Plan, and all recommendations from Our Bravery Brought Justice report relating to school governance will receive detailed attention as part of that work. In addition, I am pleased to hear that the Welsh Government has announced a review of the School Governance system, and as a Council we are very keen to play every possible part in that process. We will need to look at the Council's governance arrangements, and I will commission the Chief Executive to work with an external body such as the WPGA. We would welcome cross-party collaboration on the terms of reference for this work.

The Supplementary Question of Councillor John Pughe Roberts

The response does not offer much credibility in the Cabinet, and I ask for an Extraordinary meeting of the Council to look into these matters only, and I ask whether this will happen.

Response from the Leader, Councillor Nia Jeffreys

Before the Leader responded, the Monitoring Officer highlighted that this item was a question for the Leader, and it could not lead to any decision beyond these responses.

The Leader responded that the call for an extraordinary meeting was not a specific decision for her, but that she was happy to hold a discussion on the matters in the item on today's agenda. It was explained that this was not a decision for the Leader to make.

The Chief Executive added, in terms of the principle of holding the discussion, that three specific committees had been scheduled for January regarding this matter - i.e., two Scrutiny Committees and an item at the Governance and Audit Committee.

Question by Councillor Angela Russell

In light of the publication of the Child Practice Review, 'Our Bravery Brought Justice', and the identification of over fifty missed opportunities to safeguard the children, what specific lessons have been learned, and what assurances can be provided that such systemic failures will not recur? It is of particular concern that many of these lessons should have been embedded following the Waterhouse Inquiry.

Response from the Leader of the Council, Councillor Nia Jeffreys

Thank you for this extremely important and timely question, in our First Full Council meeting since the publication of 'Our Bravery Brought Justice' exactly a month ago today – a report which clearly highlights the Council's failures. I wish to acknowledge the courage of the victims and survivors; it is their bravery that drives me to act. Of course, we fully accept the findings of the review and recognise all the missed opportunities. These failures should never have happened. As Leader of the Council, I apologise to the victims and to everyone affected by these crimes.

Work to recover and respond to these events is underway to improve and strengthen the Council's arrangements. A Response Board has been established to provide scrutiny and challenge, and I am extremely grateful to the Independent Chair, Professor Sally Holland, for her consistent challenge and leadership.

I also wish to thank the many other agencies who act as observers on the Board – the Welsh Government, the Children's Commissioner, Estyn, Care Inspectorate Wales, and the Regional Safeguarding Board. Their contribution is invaluable.

Along with my Cabinet colleagues, I am also a member of the Board to ensure that progress is being made and to provide challenge, support, and resources to deliver.

Since the publication of the Our Bravery Brought Justice report, a new Response Plan is being developed. Every recommendation is being addressed in the action plan under seven themes, aligned with the themes of the report. Work has begun, but there is much more to do.

An Assurance Group has been established by Welsh Ministers, and in November, Care

Inspectorate Wales and Estyn conducted a joint review, examining safeguarding arrangements, the voice of the child, how we collaborate with other agencies such as the police, and governance, training, and staff support across the Children and Education Departments.

In my view, the more eyes we have on this work, the better. The new Response Plan will be presented to the Governance and Audit Committee, as well as to the Care Scrutiny Committee and the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee early in the new year, giving Councillors the opportunity to provide their valuable input.

It is a national shame that the recommendations of the Waterhouse report published in 2000, and the Clywch report in 2004, have not been implemented in full. This Council will work tirelessly and relentlessly to ensure that the recommendations and findings of 'Our Bravery Brought Justice' report are fully delivered, without excuses. I will not shy away from my responsibility as Leader; my priority is to restore trust and to do everything within our power to protect the children of Gwynedd. Nothing is more important to me, and to everyone in our county, than the safety of our children.

Here are examples of some actions that have taken place or are underway over time – this is only a small sample, as there are over 200 actions within the detailed work programme behind the Response Plan:

What has already happened?	<p>An audit has been carried out of cases where there is more than one referral concerning individuals in positions of trust</p> <p>Increased frequency of safeguarding quality visits to schools</p> <p>'Grooming' has been added to the safeguarding training pack for schools</p> <p>Appointment of a new Safeguarding Champion to promote and raise awareness of safeguarding training across the Council</p> <p>A social worker visits every child involved in a referral and listens to them</p>
What will be achieved in the next 3 months?	<p>Training for staff to identify and record changes in children's behaviour that may indicate 'grooming' or abuse</p> <p>Development of a Voice of the Child Policy, with the next step being its formal adoption</p> <p>Increasing resources (staff) within the Education Safeguarding and Well-being Team</p> <p>Formal adoption of a new "Whistleblowing" policy</p>
What will happen in the next 3-12 months?	<p>Roll-out of a new system for schools to report concerns</p> <p>Implementation of any national changes during this period</p> <p>A training programme embedded to ensure that Cyngor Gwynedd is a 'Trauma-Informed' organisation</p> <p>Cyngor Gwynedd working towards a 'Child-Friendly County' status</p>

Supplementary Question by Councillor Angela Russell

Thank you for the response; we must remember that after the Waterhouse Enquiry it was one, brave, lone social worker who brought the inquiry forward. But what is different here is that social workers did not lead on this, instead, the children's bravery led to this

investigation to bring down a big bully, not professional staff. Assurances are sought that everyone is safe in schools, as there is concern that the same people continue to make decisions at this point in time. Therefore, considering the seriousness of the failings noted and the ongoing concerns regarding transparency and accountability, I am not satisfied that the child practice review has been responded to in full, neither does it address the depth of the issue, nor has it restored public confidence. Will this Council now support my call, for the second time, for a public inquiry into the safeguarding failings in Cyngor Gwynedd, to ensure that every voice is heard, that all evidence is publicly considered and that robust and sustainable change is achieved?

Answer - Leader of the Council, Councillor Nia Jeffreys

Thank you and I agree and the bravery of the victims drives everyone on to do this important work. I agree with the call for a public inquiry and my first act as Leader was to make the same call. The Cabinet has also made the same call and a letter has been sent to Eluned Morgan to make the same request.

Question by Councillor Louise Hughes

Remembrance Sunday is a national day of solemn reflection, honouring those who served and paid the ultimate sacrifice for the Freedoms we enjoy today, it is a debt we can never repay. Will this council declare free parking on Remembrance Sunday in Gwynedd Council car parks for those wishing to pay their respects, in line with other Local Authorities?

Response from the Cabinet Member for the Environment, Councillor Craig ab Iago

Cyngor Gwynedd fully recognises the significance and solemnity of Remembrance Sunday.

I would welcome a discussion with Cllr Louise Hughes and the relevant officers to consider this request further.

This would include how such an arrangement could be practicably implemented and the considerations and implications related to that.

Supplementary Question by Councillor Louise Hughes

She noted her hope for a more determined and clear answer, but she proposed specific times for free parking on Remembrance Sunday.

Question by Councillor Rhys Tudur

Given that:

Councillors on the scrutiny committees and other committees in the Council offer constructive and valuable comments on the items discussed.

Findings and comments are formally minuted with a view to bringing them to the attention of Cabinet and Officers in full.

Too often when those items come before Cabinet all that is noted on the Cabinet agenda is a few short sentences or no comment at all by councillors, e.g. on matters such as

- Staff well-being report
- Toilet Strategy
- Housing Action Plan
- Planning Policy Committee items.

Does this not show a lack of respect for the views/impressions of Councillors and ignores the voice of those members who are not Cabinet Members?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Corporate and Legal Services, Councillor

Llio Elenid Owen

Thank you for the comments and the question.

The submission of any report for a Cabinet decision requires thorough information. Cabinet must consider several factors when making all decisions (e.g. the Well-being of Future Generations Act, equality, the Welsh language, socio-economic impact, etc.) as well as the comments of any consultation, e.g. with a scrutiny committee or the public.

Where a committee or working group has considered a matter prior to submission for a decision by the Cabinet, it is expected that information will be included in the report. Rigorous guidelines and a specific template have been created for reporting to Cabinet, which clearly articulate the above.

It is pleasing to see your positive comments about scrutiny, and I am aware that considerable work has been done by the Scrutiny Committees to refine the recommendations submitted to Cabinet Members. It is important to remember that it is the comments of the committee, and not individuals, that are submitted.

In addition, work has taken place to develop a procedure whereby the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee receives an invitation to attend a Cabinet meeting when an item has been scrutinised in advance to elaborate on the discussion and grounds for the committee's decision. This development is still in its early days, but I am confident that it is a positive step in order to ensure the input of the scrutiny committees.

I acknowledge that there are inconsistencies in the content of reports to Cabinet at the moment, there are good examples of referring to the work of the scrutiny members and/or members of the Planning Policy Working Group in Cabinet reports, and poor examples too. There is scope for us as Cabinet Members to look at improving this in the future.

It is certainly not intended to ignore the voice of Members who are not Cabinet members or to disrespect the views and impressions of the relevant committees or working groups.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Rhys Tudur

Given that I have referred to unacceptable cases where no comment or record of the recommendations of the scrutiny committees were on the cabinet's agenda, let alone the minutes of the scrutiny committee, is it too much to ask for a better system where the Cabinet at least sees the decisions of the scrutiny committees as well as the recommendations of individual members of the committee, as well as minutes of the discussion, so that members feel as if they are not wasting their time or speaking in a void when contributing and giving their time during long scrutiny discussions.

Response of the Cabinet Member for Corporate Support, Councillor Llio Elenid Owen

I must disagree with the allegation that there is no comment on the recommendations of the scrutiny committees in the examples given. There is a very good example of the scrutiny committee's recommendation, as well as a summary of the discussion in the report of the Cabinet Member for Housing and Property on the Housing Action Plan, and a Procurement Strategy, which has been delayed to hold further discussions following the Scrutiny Committee.

It is not customary, or practically possible on every occasion, to include the Scrutiny

Committees' full minutes, and this is because of the timings from scrutiny committees to the Cabinet. Of course, it is not possible to include the comments of individual members, as the Cabinet Members consider the committee's decisions as a body.

I acknowledge that there is room for improvement and I am happy to look again at our arrangements. I emphasise that scrutiny members are not wasting their time and that valuable discussions are being considered and appreciated by myself and every other Cabinet Member.

Question by Councillor Elin Walker Jones

As we have just marked White Ribbon Day, and with violence against women continuing to be a national crisis, what progress has Cyngor Gwynedd made to become a trauma-informed authority?

Response of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Supporting Families, Councillor Menna Trenholme

Thank you for the question. The Council has already been a White Ribbon accredited organisation since 2022. This year, once again, the Council has been part of that campaign to eradicate violence against girls and women. This year's campaign focused on the theme of encouraging men and boys to raise their voices against violence against girls and women. I thank my colleague, Councillor Llio Elenid Owen, for leading on that campaign.

Beyond White Ribbon Day and in the context of the ongoing national crisis in relation to violence against girls and women, it is vital that we do everything we can as a Council to work in a way that protects and respects the experiences of those living with trauma. Becoming a trauma-informed authority is part of that.

Although we are only at the beginning of the journey as a Council, important work is already underway. Mapping work has recently been carried out across all departments to understand the current situation. The responses show that there is an interest and recognition of the need to develop a trauma-informed approach, and identify clear gaps, particularly in terms of staff confidence and understanding of trauma, and consistency of training in the field.

Nevertheless, we have strong foundations to build on. Excellent work is already taking place in services that work closely with people experiencing trauma such as the homelessness services, refugee support and some teams within adult and children's services. Gwynedd's education sector is also in a good position with over 1,000 school staff having received trauma-informed training at an all-staff level, and almost half of the county's schools now have staff who have completed specialist Diploma training.

As a member of the Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board, I am pleased to note that the Board has identified trauma-informed practice as a key priority. This collaboration offers us a real opportunity to learn from our partners' experiences, share good practices, and collaborate and coordinate the next steps.

As a result of the recent mapping, it is clear that we need to support our staff to acquire the understanding, skills and confidence to be trauma-informed, across council departments. We therefore intend to develop a pack, supported by the Public Services Board, with a basic presentation for members and frontline workers, training for managers, and specialist training for frontline teams working with people who have experienced trauma. We want to develop a support and learning pack that will ensure a

consistent approach across the organisation and reduce the need for departments to commission training individually.

We are also exploring formal accreditation options that could strengthen and support our commitment as an organisation. However, we are clear that what is most important is to foster a real trauma-informed culture in our day-to-day work and not just secure a badge or label.

Therefore, although we are in the early stages, we have a solid foundation, strong partnerships regionally, and clear planning work in the pipeline. The Council is committed to moving forward towards being a truly trauma-informed organisation in order to make our services safer, more compassionate and responsive for all, especially those who have experienced violence and trauma.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Elin Walker Jones

Thank you for the comprehensive answer, but what is the Council doing to ensure that we ask and listen to children and young people, to ensure that we meet the need more than ever so that we understand the long-term impact of trauma on children and to identify opportunities to support them, behaving with empathy and understanding at all times.

Response of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Supporting Families, Councillor Menna Trenholme

These matters are all important and I am proud to have the opportunity to discuss them. The matters raised are ones that I am passionate about, and the Council is looking at many fields, and I see this through four streams. Firstly, we are looking at the possibilities of working towards a UNICEF Child Friendly County accreditation, which is based on the United Nations' convention on the rights of the child. I understand that staff have been discussing with the Children's Commissioner and I will meet with a Councillor from Cardiff Council next weekend, as they are already a Child Friendly county. Secondly, the incredible work of the Youth Forum and developments ensuring that engagement, discussion and listening to the voice of children is happening in our county. Thirdly, the development of a comprehensive policy on the voice of the child to be adopted by the County as a whole, and last but not least is to ensure that we develop into a trauma-informed county.

Collectively, this involves a large amount of work that will develop over the coming months, and hopefully, in due course, there will be an invitation for you to be involved in the work of the Youth Forum to ensure that we listen, hear, and act, following their voice.

Question by Councillor Beca Roberts

Can the Cabinet Member confirm how much funding has been generated through Section 106 agreements since May 2022, and how much of that total remains uncommitted or unallocated?

Response from the Cabinet Member for the Environment, Councillor Craig ab Iago

Since May 2022, £348,516 in total has been received by the Council as financial contributions through agreements completed in accordance with the provisions of Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).

A Section 106 agreement is a legally binding contract between a developer (or a number of interested parties) and a Local Planning Authority that operates alongside a

statutory planning permission. Such agreements require developers to carry out specified planning obligations when implementing planning permissions.

Therefore, all of the financial contributions received have been committed, as these types of agreements specifically state and allocate how the money has to be spent.

Contributions like these can be used for addressing needs such as education, road improvements, provision of play facilities in order to overcome impacts of a development on an area.

There are legal requirements that relate to the use of Section 106 Agreements, and they can only be used if they meet the statutory tests. Any planning obligation must be:

necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms;
directly relevant to the development; and
fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind.

It can be confirmed therefore that all the money has been committed or allocated.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Beca Roberts

Freedom of information data from the Council in May 2024 has shown that over £60,000 106 contributions have remained unspent for long periods of time; bearing in mind that this funding is all earmarked, how does the Cabinet Member explain this situation and the steps that the Council is taking to ensure that the money reaches communities in a timely manner?

Response from the Cabinet Member for the Environment, Councillor Craig ab Iago

The Council is of course trying to spend money promptly and ensure that it helps communities, but maybe an offer of a meeting to discuss this with me and officers will assist you.

Question by Councillor Gruffydd Williams

Following the fact that article 4 has been quashed by Judge Justice Eyre and because of what he said, "that there has been significant misleading by the Officers of this Council", will the Council apologise to campaigners who have fought so hard to enforce article 4?

Response from the Cabinet Member for the Environment, Councillor Craig ab Iago

As a Council, we have been determined to do everything in our power to ensure that the people of Gwynedd have access to suitable homes in their communities. That is why we have taken a series of proactive steps - including introducing the Article 4 Direction - to manage the significant number of homes that are being lost, as they are converted into second homes or short-term holiday lets.

Research carried out before introducing the Article 4 Direction showed that 65% of Gwynedd households were being priced out of the housing market, with the problem even more acute in communities where there is a high proportion of holiday homes.

As the Member will be aware, this Council has led the way in this area and was the first Planning Authority in Wales to introduce an Article 4 Direction as a means of controlling

the use of housing such as second homes and holiday accommodation. I'm proud that we are willing to innovate and do everything we can to ensure that the people of Gwynedd have access to suitable homes in their communities, I certainly won't apologise for that.

Of course, we are extremely disappointed with the Judge's decision to reject our verbal request for permission to appeal the judgement, and that Article 4 is quashed in the Gwynedd Local Planning Authority area. We will now be pressing ahead with a written appeal to protect the Council's decision to introduce Article 4 in Gwynedd.

This request will be submitted shortly. As we intend to appeal the decision, the related legal process is ongoing, and the legal case remains live. It would not be appropriate for me to comment further on the case at this point.

Supplementary question from Councillor Gruffydd Williams

As one who has battled for several years to try and ensure that there are legislative and taxation changes to restrict the number of holiday homes and holiday units in our communities, this is not the answer that I had expected to the question regarding the judge's comment that the Council's officers had significantly misled when conveying information to the Cabinet members. I was asking for an apology on behalf of all the campaigners who had fought so hard, because of this significant misleading, I was not asking for an apology for the community housing. I ask for an apology in line with my original question.

Response from the Cabinet Member for the Environment, Councillor Craig ab Iago

I have responded to the original question, and I cannot say more than that.

Question by Councillor Delyth Lloyd Griffiths

The Council owns 39 smallholdings, several of which are in my ward of Rhyd-y-main. I have had many constituents contact me during this year. The dwelling houses and also farm buildings require considerable maintenance work.

I understand that the Council has appointed a private professional company to assess the work that needs to be carried out. I would like to know from the Cabinet Member what the timetable of the work programme is for spending the money earmarked by Cabinet for making significant improvements to the dwellings and also the farm buildings?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Housing and Property, Councillor Paul Rowlinson

I would like to start by highlighting that the money earmarked towards addressing improvements to the Smallholdings Estate has been specifically allocated for upgrading housing standards, as part of the Council's Housing Action Plan. Any maintenance elements relating to the farm buildings will be subject to further discussions between Council officers and tenants, varying according to the content of the tenancies.

The task of assessing the Work Programme to be undertaken as part of this financial investment was undertaken by internal officers, with the content of the programme based on the outcomes of internal condition surveys. No private company has been involved in the task of assessing the work to be carried out.

In terms of a timeframe for undertaking the Work Programme, it is intended to start the

first phase of the Programme in the new year, with the Programme as a whole set over a two-year period.

All tenants have been informed of the financial commitment made as part of the Housing Action Plan, and further correspondence has been sent to those tenants who will have work undertaken on their holdings as part of the first phase of the programme.

Should any tenant have specific concerns, I would encourage them to contact the relevant officers in the Council as usual.

Supplementary Question by Councillor Delyth Lloyd Griffiths

I am happy to hear that every tenant received a letter in August, and that they know exactly what assessment has been carried out on their home and the nature of the work to be carried out on their home; I eagerly look forward to Ymgynghoriaeth Gwynedd commencing the work immediately in January 2026, and to the work being completed in two years. How much money is available to do this work?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Housing and Property, Councillor Paul Rowlinson

There is a budget of £2.1 million for the work; this money is part of the former Housing Action Plan which is funded through the premium on second homes and long-term empty properties.

7. COUNCIL TAX: DISCRETIONARY POWERS TO ALLOW DISCOUNTS AND/OR RAISE A PREMIUM ON SECOND HOMES AND LONG-TERM EMPTY DWELLINGS

The report was submitted, noting in line with the Local Government Finance Act 1992 that an annual decision was needed on charging a council tax premium. It was explained that if no decision was made, then they would be forced to offer a discount of 50%. The current situation was noted, i.e. that a premium of 150% was payable on second homes, and 100% on long-term empty properties, and that this had been the case since April 2023. The officer stated that the money being raised through the premium had been used for housing schemes.

It was highlighted that the number of long-term empty properties had remained high, with around 1120 long-term empty properties in June 2025. It was expressed that the department had looked at the experiences of other counties and that it had strongly highlighted that a premium of 150% was most effective to get houses back into use, and as a result it was noted that this was one of the recommendations in the decision sought.

The Cabinet Member took the opportunity to respond to some of the comments he had received during the day, e.g. he emphasised that there was no council tax payable when working through probate, or for 6 months following the decision. Attention was also drawn to the exemption system that was now in place in the Council.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations.

An enquiry was made on taking an individual vote on each clause; however, it

was explained that it was a single decision within the process and that the only way to adapt the clauses was by proposing an amendment to the whole proposal.

It was expressed that charging a premium on second homes was not intended to place an unfair financial burden on locals who let houses to visitors on a small-scale; however unintentional harm had been caused to these families from a decision that was made without fully considering them; and they faced huge, unexpected bills out of the blue. Assurances were sought that it would be possible to refine the exemption policy to incorporate these types of cases at pace, as some of these were a perfect example of sustainable tourism.

It was highlighted that two things were missing in terms of information about empty homes; the reasons why they were empty, as well as the Exemption Policy. The need for an exemption policy from the outset was expressed, as there were situations and circumstances where there was no reason to charge a tax, such as renting rooms within homes. It was noted in response that the Exemption Policy was now in place since the introduction of Council Tax, such as individuals going into care homes. It was expressed that the Revenues Service does not collect information on why properties are empty as there is no reasons to do so, but that the Housing Department was carrying out research into this and to see how people could be assisted to bring houses back into use.

Concern was expressed about charging 150% for empty properties as this affected individuals who were working to upgrade houses and that 12 months was not enough to complete the work. It was noted that having an exemption policy which allowed for an extension to the statutory 12-month period, would alleviate concerns.

Comments were raised about business rates and the impact that this would have on businesses such as hotels, but it was noted that this was a Government decision, not a Council decision.

It was emphasised that charging a premium on empty houses to 150% was not intended as a money-making scheme; rather it was an attempt to bring houses back into use. It was explained that the staff in the Finance department were available to discuss and to give a fair hearing for individuals to appeal.

RESOLVED

The following was agreed for the 2026/27 financial year:

- **That Cyngor Gwynedd allows NO discount on class A second homes, in accordance with Section 12 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (i.e. no change).**
- **That Cyngor Gwynedd allows NO discount and RAISES A PREMIUM OF 150% on class B second homes, under Section 12B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (i.e. no change).**
- **That Cyngor Gwynedd allows NO discount on homes that have been empty for 6 months or more and RAISES A PREMIUM OF 150% on homes that have been empty for 12 months or more, under Section 12A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992) (i.e. increase the premium from 100% to 150%).**

8. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2026/27

The item was submitted noting that there was a statutory requirement to present this item annually. It was explained that the purpose of the report was to make a decision on the arrangements to implement the council tax reduction scheme. It was explained that there was no change to this year's scheme, and that this needed to be submitted for a decision for 2026/27. It was emphasised that the report was specifically for a reduction where there was a need to satisfy the benefits service's means testing and not for other exceptions such as a single person reduction.

The decision was noted.

RESOLVED

Resolved:

1. That Cyngor Gwynedd's Local Scheme for the year commencing 1 April 2026 continues as it was during 2025/26. Therefore, the following conditions (a - c below) regarding the continuation of the discretionary elements would continue:
 - a. to apply a 100% disregard for war disablement pensions, war widows' pensions and war widowers' pensions, for both pensioners and working age claimants.
 - b. Not to increase the extended reduction periods for pensioners and working age claimants from the standard four weeks in the Prescribed Scheme.
 - c. Not to increase the backdated period for pensioners and working age claimants from the standard three months contained within the Prescribed Scheme.
2. Where appropriate, to delegate powers to the Head of Finance Department, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, to make minor amendments to the scheme for 2026/27, on condition that it will not change the substance of the scheme.

9. ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT AND SELF ASSESSMENT 2024/25

The report, which summarised the Council's work over the past year, was submitted. It was expressed that the Our Bravery Brought Justice report had been submitted after this report had been formulated, but it was emphasised that the Council would fully implement the report's findings.

It was noted that it was miraculous that the Council had achieved so much, considering the financial gap, but that it was committed to protect the services used daily by residents. Upon reflection, it was expressed that there was so much to report and that the attention needed to be on people, not statistics. Attention was drawn to various plans, which included Supporting People. Attention was also drawn to the progress made to plans which addressed poverty and the cost-of-living, by supporting community hubs and food banks.

The work of Gwynedd Werdd was highlighted, noting that there were many examples of staff going above and beyond in all areas of Gwynedd. Attention was drawn to a high number of successful grants, and specifically £2m for Slate Communities with the LleChi LleNi scheme, which celebrated slate heritage.

It was emphasised that the Council was facing major challenges, and that the

financial situation would force very difficult decisions, but it was ensured that they would lobby and voice discontent about the lack of investment in Local Government, specifically in rural areas.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations.

Members gave thanks for the report and attention was drawn to several aspects. In terms of travelling and national developments - enquiries were made about whether the developments would include rural areas such as Pen Llŷn. Gratitude was expressed for the developments happening in Penrhos, however, concern was expressed about flooding on the A499, which was serious at present. The response given stated that in terms of buses, yes, there were national changes, but it remained to be seen what would be offered in relation to rural paths. The need to carry out additional work on the A499 was highlighted, as it had been a problem for years, and it was explained that a request had been made for additional funding.

The members gave thanks for the balanced report, which was ready to highlight risks. Attention was drawn to the engagement with staff and residents, drawing attention to two questionnaires - Staff Questionnaire and Data Cymru Questionnaire. Concerns were expressed about the low number of staff who responded to the staff satisfaction questionnaire, and in term of the Data Cymru Questionnaire, despite the encouraging responses, that a response was needed to all questions, and not just half of them. A response was given, noting that work needed to be done to obtain a higher number of responses from staff, and that a full version of Data Cymru responses would be circulated. It was also explained that consultation happened on several levels across the Council.

Looking at A Prosperous Gwynedd, it was asked whether it was possible to obtain confirmation on how a vibrant town centre could be obtained, as they were currently very bleak. The response noted that work was to be done and that there were definitive plans in place, but that work had also already been undertaken.

The Housing and Property Department was thanked for their work with Clwyd Alyn to build supported housing in Llan Ffestiniog, which were full of local people.

The Cabinet Member for the Environment was thanked for his work of bringing the last train on the Cambrian Line back into use.

Gratitude was expressed for the small grants submitted to Town and Community Councils last year for projects that would benefit the area, asking whether the same would be available this year. However, disappointment was also expressed that the costs of public toilets were increasing, and there was no time for Community Councils to respond. The response noted that community grants returned with more notice and money, hopefully, and in terms of public toilets, it was explained that correspondence with adjustments to the first letter, was on the way.

It was highlighted that there was no reference to the Ysgol Friars case until page 62 of the report, and it was explained that one would have expected it to be referenced earlier in the report. Similarly, it was noted in terms of strengths that the Estyn report highlighted that the Council promoted Child Welfare back in 2024 - should it be included in light of this case? In response, it was stated that seeing it appear so late in the report gave the wrong impression and

that it should be more prominent.

It was noted that an e-mail had been received from Members of Cylch yr Iaith about the unwillingness to use Welsh place-names on maps. Assurances were sought that the Council's departments would only use Welsh place-names, in accordance with policy. In response, examples were sought of Council departments using the names, in order to address this, and to emphasise that political pressure was needed regarding the maps and that an update would be provided when more information was received.

It was noted that the future of two schools in Dyffryn Nantlle were at stake, and it was asked how this would improve the community and the use made of the language. It was explained that the future of schools was a sensitive issue, but that there was a need to be alert to the reduction in birth rates and it was the Council's duty to consider the future of schools to ensure that a specific level was attained.

Council staff were thanked and specifically care staff for their work in light of the difficult challenges facing both departments.

RESOLVED

Cyngor Gwynedd's Annual Performance Report and Self-assessment 2024/25 was approved and adopted.

10. LOCAL RESOLUTION PROCEDURE

The report was submitted, noting that there was a local resolution procedure included within the Constitution. This was a system to deal with situations, with Members mainly, regarding low-level complaints where there was no justification to approach the Ombudsman. It was explained that the procedure had been in place since 2013 and it responded to complaints and sought reconciliation following allegations of lack of respect in the chambers or in discussions, in the main.

Last year, the Ombudsman had collated information on all local resolution procedures across Wales, and it was highlighted that on the whole it was well implemented in Gwynedd. The procedure in Gwynedd was highlighted as follows: the first step was the Investigation and seeking a simple resolution; the second step was mediation on a more formal level, and the third step was a discussion at the Standards Committee. It was noted that Counsel opinion noted that there was no role for the Standards Committee as there was no framework for the Committee in terms of mediation, and if the complaint went to the Ombudsman, there would be no role for the Standards Committee as it was already a part of the procedure. As a result, it was asked to agree to remove the role of the Standards Committee from the local resolution procedure.

It was noted that the Standards Committee had discussed a response back in November and had approved changing the procedure and to obtain more clarity on cases within the procedure.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations.

A request was made for a copy of the Ombudsman's views and Counsel's

observations. The response stated that it had been shared in full with the Standards Committee and that a summary had been shared, but that anyone could contact the Monitoring Officer to view the document; however, it was explained that there was a need to be careful in terms of sharing it publicly, due to the legal implications.

Reference was made to the Equality Act, noting that translations of the definitions of "gender" and "gender identity" had been wrongly translated in the document, and that the High Court had noted "gender" and "gender identity" as an ideology, instead of fact. As a result, it was noted that it was not appropriate to be noted in the code of conduct, which could lead to members being accused and investigated for breaching it in reality when acting to safeguard women. A question was asked about who decided on the definition of when a Member breached the Code of Conduct, as the above statement could lead to prosecution if the Member did not agree with the views or beliefs of the Monitoring Officer. It was emphasised that the wording of the document corresponded with the Ombudsman's guidance, but that he was willing to change if it required. In terms of determining who breached the Code of Conduct, it was noted that it fell on the Code of Conduct, Standards Committee, Monitoring Officer, and the public could also note this. It was reiterated by explaining that the Tribunal being chaired by a Judge had the final say. It was expressed that the Code of Conduct was a very detailed document, and that the discussion and view of the Monitoring Officer was given on a professional level with legal principles central to this view.

An enquiry was made regarding the Ombudsman's arrangements in Wales, as there were adaptations to it, in comparison to England. It was explained that the Ombudsman's arrangements in Wales had a different procedure, highlighting that final decisions on cases and appeals were made by the Tribunal.

RESOLVED

The amended Internal Resolution Procedure was adopted.

11. NOTICES OF MOTION

The following notice of motion was submitted by Councillor Beca Brown under Section 4.19 of the Constitution and it was seconded. The member set out the context to her motion, noting:-

- That it took a village to bring up a child, with the intention of protecting the children. She emphasised that everyone, both officers and Councillors, were a part of the village and had a responsibility to commit to be a voice for those without a voice and a shoulder for those who were most vulnerable.
- When adults abused the most vulnerable in society, i.e. children, it destroyed lives.
- It was emphasised that the young girls had been the brave ones here, not the adults.
- It was vowed that child protection was at the heart of this work, and if there was concern, "think the unthinkable", as noted by Jan Pickles.
- The proposal clearly noted that the publication of the report was only the beginning of the work, and that there was a need to work together to be a county where people who wished to turn to the Council were aware that their voice was heard and that action was taken, and to be the county that the children deserved.

The motion was supported, noting:-

- An apology to the children and they were thanked for their bravery. Unfortunately, and with a heavy heart, the council had seriously failed in several ways. It was noted that there were clear themes where children's voices had not been listened to. It was expressed that there was a need to be alert to and to know how to respond effectively to safeguarding matters.
- The need to carry out a self-assessment again was noted, since we as a Council had fallen short of our statutory duties.
- It was expressed that there was a need to revisit processes as well as the Council's attitude to processes as it had been highlighted as a clear failure in the Child Practice Review.
- The seriousness of the report was emphasised, and important themes running through the report were highlighted, such as consistent failures to follow the child protection guidelines correctly and a failure to identify transferrable risks.
- Further potential investigations were noted, which included investigations to see whether the Council's response was sufficient and prompt and investigate the roles of other agencies in the case.
- The need to look at the relationship between the Education Department, School Governors and the School, as this had failed in Friars, emphasising how it looked in the real world, and thus ensuring the correct culture.
- It was asked that Safeguarding training to be carried out by external specialists, and it was not done in-house.
- It was noted that the Cabinet would be looking at what investigations needed to be carried out and that they were done independently.
- It was emphasised that the Council had let families and children down and had broken the trust of parents sending their children to school.
- It was expressed that this had not started in 2027, but rather 44 years ago when he had started to work in the field. It was noted that several concerns had been highlighted and that nothing had been done, despite the complaints being raised.
- A request was made for Jan Pickles to come to the Council to assist with the way forward.
- Concern was expressed about having a single group serving on the Cabinet, and for one group chairing the majority of Scrutiny Committee as well as performance challenging, emphasising the need to listen on a cross-party basis.
- A duty on all the members to collaborate and move on from this awful chapter. But there was a long road ahead of the Council.
- Members were thanked for raising the matter today, noting concerns about being slow when dealing with an issue, as well as lack of clinical focus on the organisational procedures. It was expressed that this raised concerns about confidence in the Council's leadership.
- A member asked whether there was a risk that Welsh Government would place the Council under special measures as a result of this and Article 4. It was explained that the Council was accountable to the Government's Assurance Board, which had been happy with the progress made, and that the Council had committed in full to ensure that this did not happen again.

RESOLVED to adopt the motion, namely:-

In line with the Notice of Motion received in accordance with Section 4.19 of the Constitution, a motion was received from Councillor Beca Brown proposing as follows:-

We would like to welcome the publication of the Child Practice Review on 4 November, noting our deep thanks to chair, Jan Pickles, for her careful work, and so too to the panel and to the North Wales Safeguarding Board.

We would like to note the title of the report, which is Our Bravery Brought Justice. It is important that we always acknowledge the title when discussing this report, as it pays a well-deserved tribute to the bravery of children – children who were supposed to be safe in their schools, and children who ended years of horrific offending by one of the most powerful men in this county. We owe them a great deal. Our thoughts are with them, and we thank them from the bottom of our hearts for their remarkable determination and resilience.

We as a council are committed to learning all the lessons that come from the report, but beyond that, we are committed to looking at any relevant issues that have fallen outside the remit of the CPR, which looked at the case of this offender in the period from 2017 to September 2023.

We therefore call on the Cabinet to consider what further independent investigations are needed to address matters outside the boundaries of the CPR. We are fully alert to the fact that further work needs to be done and ask the Cabinet to work tirelessly to identify what is yet to be achieved.

We once again express our sincere apologies to the children who have suffered harm, and we pledge to leave no stone unturned to ensure, to the best of our ability, that 'never again' means 'never again'.

11(b) NOTICE OF MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR NIA JEFFREYS

The following notice of motion was submitted by Councillor Nia Jeffreys under Section 4.19 of the Constitution, and it was seconded. The member set out the context to her motion, noting:-

- That it was a self-explanatory motion which had been drawn up skilfully by another member of the Council and support to it was sought.

The motion was supported, noting:-

- That the facts showed a concerning increase and that social factors such as loneliness played a prominent part.
- It was emphasised that there was a key role for the Council to empower people and the Council was encouraged to work with partners such as schools, charities, and community organisations, to strengthen the response and support for the residents of Gwynedd.
- Attention was drawn to two important countryside bodies, which offered specific support to agriculture and local businesses.

RESOLVED to adopt the motion, namely:-

In line with the Notice of Motion received in accordance with Section 4.19 of the Constitution, Councillor Nia Jeffreys will propose as follows:-

Propose that the Council:

1. Notes: that suicide figures in Wales registered in 2024 were 15.7 per 100,000 people which was an increase on the figure for 2023, which was 14.0 per 100,000. There are several factors associated with suicide, including: poverty, unemployment, mental and physical health problems, grief, abuse, loneliness, relationship problems, alcohol and substance misuse etc.

We also note that suicide is the leading cause of death of young people up to the age of 35 according to the Papyrus charity, because young people rarely die from other causes.

Middle-aged men between the ages of 30-44 in Wales are most likely to commit suicide. 76% of deaths by suicide were men. There is a correlation between poverty and suicide, with 15.8 in 100,000 suicides occurring in deprived areas, and 8.6 in 100,000 in the least deprived areas. 126.7 in 100,000 are unemployed.

Suicide is preventable, and support is available.

2. Believe: That the people of Wales have a right to live in communities that are free of the fear and stigma that are associated with suicide and self-harm. We believe that the people of Wales have a right to be empowered and supported to access and offer support wherever they are needed (Welsh Government, 2025).

We all have a role, as individuals and organisations, to support those affected by suicide. We believe that the Council has a role to work with other stakeholders, to take action to prevent suicide, reduce stigma, and offer support. We believe that the Council has a role to play in taking concrete steps to protect our young people, empowering them to look after themselves and others.

Principles - Welsh Government's Suicide Prevention Strategy (Understanding: suicide and self-harm prevention strategy)

1. *Self-harm and suicide are everyone's business, and everyone can make a difference with the right training and support.*
2. *It must be clear who leads on and is responsible for every action in the strategy.*
3. *The focus is on prevention, identifying risks early on and offering appropriate support to keep people safe.*
4. *Services should be fair and accessible to all, removing barriers that affect different groups.*
5. *There is a need to focus on higher risk groups, providing proportionate and appropriate support.*
6. *Anyone should be able to get help immediately ('no wrong door') without having to repeat their story.*
7. *The voices of people with lived experiences must be listened to and individual-centred services must be co-planned.*
8. *The strategy should support the Welsh language, ensuring that people are cared for in their own language without having to ask.*
9. *The actions must be evidence-based and their consequences clear.*
10. *The work should be trauma-informed, providing compassionate and empathetic care.*
11. *It is important to address stigma, promoting understanding and compassion.*
12. *A rights-based approach should be adopted, protecting the rights of all individuals.*
13. *The strategy must cover all ages, ensuring that support is available to everyone from babies to older people.*
14. *The social and economic factors that influence health and well-being should be recognised.*
15. *The role of digital technology should be considered, where it can improve outcomes or sustainability.*
16. *Funding and resources must be made available, testing what steps are realistic within the existing resources.*

4. I call on my fellow Members to support the motion.

- (a) That this Council declares firm support for the principles of the Welsh Government's Suicide Prevention Strategy and supports the work of

the Cabinet to establish a strategy for Cyngor Gwynedd.

- (b) That members should do all they can to ensure that the Council implements policies that support individuals, prevent suicide, empowering the Council's structures,
 - (c) It supports opportunities in schools to discuss suicide as an aspect of mental health discussions, in the context of personal and social education, equipping our pupils to look after themselves and others in a sensitive way, by teachers who are given the appropriate support, supervision and training to provide such education.
- 1.

The meeting commenced at 1.30 pm and concluded at 5.25 pm

CHAIRMAN