
EDUCATION AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
19/01/26

Present:

Councillors: Councillor Cai Larsen (Chair)
Councillor Rhys Tudur (Vice-chair)

Councillors:- Beca Brown, Jina Gwyrfai, Gareth Tudor Jones, Gwilym Jones, Beth Lawton, Dewi Owen, John Pughe Roberts, Richard Glyn Roberts, Huw Llwyd Rowlands, Gwynfor Owen, Dawn Lynne Jones, Geraint Parry, Elwyn Jones and Sian Williams.

Co-opted Members: Colette Owen (The Catholic Church), Sharon Roberts (Arfon Parents / Governor Representative), Gweno Glyn Williams (Dwyfor Parents / Governors Representative) and Elise Poulter (NEU).

Officers present: Bethan Adams (Scrutiny Consultant), Iwan Evans (Monitoring Officer) and Jasmine Jones (Democracy Services Officer).

Present for item 4 – Councillor Nia Jeffreys (Leader of the Council), Councillor Menna Trenholme (Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children and Supporting Families), Councillor Dewi Jones (Cabinet Member for Education), Dafydd Gibbard (Chief Executive), Dylan Owen (Statutory Director of Social Services), Aled Gibbard (Interim Head of Resources, Children's Department), Gwern ap Rhisiart (Head of Education Department), Alison Halliday (Assistant Head of School Support), Llion Williams (Safeguarding and Well-being Quality Leader), Catrin Love (Assistant Head of Corporate Services) and Ffion Mai Jones (Senior Executive Manager).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Dyfrig Siencyn.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

None to note.

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

4. RESPONSE PLAN TO THE OUR BRAVERY BROUGHT JUSTICE REPORT

The Council Leader presented the report and noted that a sincere apology had already been offered to the victims and all those affected by the heinous offences committed that had led to the Our Bravery Brought Justice report, and it was emphasised that without definitive action any apology was meaningless. It was emphasised that action was key to ensure practical change and provide assurance that such failures would not happen again. It was noted that children's voices had

not been heard before, but that children's experiences and voices were central to the Response Plan in moving forward.

It was noted that scrutiny was an essential part of the democratic process, and that a constructive challenge was essential on such a serious issue. It was confirmed that the meeting was part of a series of scrutiny meetings, and that discussions in the Care Scrutiny Committee and the Governance and Audit Committee had resulted in practical recommendations and specific actions. It was noted that several recommendations had already been implemented immediately by officers to strengthen safeguarding arrangements.

It was stressed that transparency was essential to restore public confidence and staff confidence. It was confirmed that the Response Plan was a live and public document, and the minutes of the Response Plan Programme Board meetings would be published on the Council's website to enable members and the public to see the progress being made.

It was acknowledged that the subject was difficult to discuss and the report had been difficult to read, and the Committee was thanked for scrutinising the matter in a sensitive and professional manner. It was emphasised that safeguarding and protecting children from harm was the Council's most important responsibility. It was noted that it was positive that several members were scrutinising the Plan.

Confidence was expressed in the Response Plan and the cross-departmental work taking place to improve safeguarding arrangements. Professor Sally Holland, Chair of the Response Plan Programme Board, was thanked for her guidance. It was recognised that the Response Plan did not currently include all responses as it was a live document, and as such the input of the scrutiny committees was important.

The Committee was invited to submit constructive comments, suggestions and criticism to strengthen the Response Plan before it was submitted to Cabinet for formal adoption. It was noted that improving safeguarding arrangements depended on information sharing, consistent working with partners and stakeholders, and collaboration across services and political divides, and that this work could not be carried out by one service, one department, one political group or one person alone. It was noted that there was a willingness to return to the Committee in due course to report on the progress of the Response Plan and to conduct the dialogue.

The Chief Executive noted that the meeting was another important step forward on a challenging path to restore confidence and achieve the goal of securing the best possible safeguarding arrangements. It was acknowledged that the topic was a difficult one, but that it was important to be able to discuss the issue openly following a long period of reviews and investigations, which had been frustrating for all. It was noted that the first Response Plan had been published over a year ago, prior to the publication of the child practice review, and there was an acknowledgement from the outset that it would need to be reviewed and updated

following the publication of the report, and that the revised version was being presented to the Committee at this meeting.

It was confirmed that the Plan had already been considered by the Response Plan Programme Board and had been subject to challenge from external organisations. It was noted that the Plan would return to the Programme Board for consideration of the observations of the extraordinary scrutiny meeting and the full council meeting, before being submitted to the Cabinet for adoption, with further scrutiny to follow.

It was noted that there were three specific areas for scrutiny. Firstly, the need for assurance that the Plan was complete and responded appropriately and comprehensively to the Our Bravery Brought Justice report was noted, and it was considered whether there was anything further that should have been included or any issue that may have been overlooked. Secondly, the need for guidance on the priorities of the Plan was noted, recognising that it was not feasible to achieve everything at the same time, consideration should be given to whether some elements needed to be prioritised more than others. Thirdly, the need to consider dependencies between local, regional and national recommendations was identified.

In terms of dependencies, an example of dependencies and the need to prioritise in relation to a low-level concerns procedure was noted. It was noted that such a procedure existed in England but not in Wales, and that there was a national recommendation for the Welsh Government to establish such a procedure. It was noted that this could take time due to the nature of the work across several authorities, and it was stressed that they could not wait for this. It was confirmed that work was already underway to establish an internal procedure by the Council, with the possibility of modifying it later if a different or better national procedure was introduced.

It was noted that the whistle-blowing arrangements had been subject to considerable discussion. It was confirmed that staff arrangements already existed but needed to be updated and improved, and that work had been carried out quickly to enable staff to use them. It was further noted that arrangements for members and governors needed to be improved as the current arrangements were scattered across different documents and were difficult to navigate. It was confirmed that work had already begun to streamline and strengthen these, including the intention to include external expertise and system users in the work of formulating the best possible arrangements.

It was noted that the appendices to the report included the revised Response Plan in narrative form, split into seven themes that aligned with the themes of the Our Bravery Brought Justice report. It was noted that a leader had been appointed for each theme. It was noted that the seven themes were:

- The child's voice and supporting victims – ensuring that children are listened to, believed and taken seriously, strengthening arrangements to give children a voice to keep them safe.
- Managing allegations and concerns about adults working with children – ensuring that safeguarding arrangements were of the highest standard, that concerns were taken seriously and addressed promptly, and that Part 5 arrangements were robust, complete and easy to understand.
- Training and policies – emphasis on ensuring that training was appropriate to roles, that policies were fully adopted and implemented in schools, and that everyone understood the need to think the unthinkable and recognise that events could happen in any setting.
- School governance – ensuring that governors understand and can carry out their roles effectively.
- Use of restrictive practices – only needed to be used when necessary and in an appropriate manner.
- Crisis Planning and Crisis Response.
- Supporting and stabilising Ysgol Friars.

It was noted that the appendices included examples of the type of monitoring reports the Response Plan Programme Board was receiving which set out a time schedule for each recommendation. It was noted that the final appendix contained the detailed action plan, with several actions, stressing that the purpose of its presentation was to demonstrate the level of detail, that leaders were identified for each workstream, that time schedules were clear, and that actions had been broken down to reduce the risk of losing any elements. The intention to ensure a robust and strong Plan was emphasised, and any new suggestions in relation to the content of the Response Plan were welcomed.

During the discussion, the following observations were made:-

Gratitude was expressed for the presentation, and it was noted that it was appropriate to recognise the significant work that had been done to produce the Response Plan. It was questioned whether the Response Plan struck the right balance between procedures and workplace culture, noting that processes could exist but were not necessarily implemented due to culture. In response, it was noted:-

- Changes to policies and procedures were relatively easy to formulate and implement on paper, but that culture change was a more complex process.
- Culture change was more difficult and time-consuming but essential to ensure that people adhere to policies and implement them consistently.
- There was a need to carry out the initial steps now, but that the work on culture change was a crucial element alongside the procedural steps.
- That the response included several layers, namely the practical actions that could be managed internally and implemented quickly, along with the softer elements that required time, including a change of culture within the Council and within schools.

Work Stream 1: The Voice of the Child and Supporting Victims

It was noted that the meeting was the beginning of the scrutiny journey and that restoring the confidence of the people of Gwynedd was likely to take years. It was asked how the workstream would ensure that the Council's arrangements and procedures would not re-traumatise the children and victims. In response, it was noted:-

- There was concern about how the ongoing discussion and public attention could impact victims, families, the community, staff, elected members and everyone else.
- That there was an awareness of the risk of re-traumatisation, and that any actions or procedures needed to avoid extending this trauma.
- That the processes involving the victims sought to minimise the trauma, with the aim of supporting them through the experience rather than exacerbating it.
- There was a commitment to give further consideration after the meeting to ensure that no element of the proposed work added to the trauma, moving forward.

It was asked how the mechanisms of the Plan had ensured that the child's voice directly influenced specific decisions. In response, it was noted:-

- That the Plan had been developed and formulated based on work streams.
- That children and young people were aware of the Plan, and that discussions had taken place in the Children and Young People's Forum.
- That care needed to be taken not to ask children too much about the same topic repeatedly, recognising that a balance needed to be struck between inclusion and protection from overloading.
- That there was a specific workstream on the voice of the child, with a commitment to strengthening the inclusion of the voices of children and young people in moving forward to ensure that lessons were learnt and that children's voices were heard in a more meaningful manner.
- That specific attention needed to be paid to the voice of the victims in a very careful way to avoid causing a recurrence of trauma.
- That the matter be considered in detail as part of the Response Board's work.

It was asked whether it would be possible to keep a record of the occasions where the voice of the child was considered or where a distinction was made, to enable future scrutiny. In response, it was noted:-

- That it was intended to ensure that the voice of the child had a real influence on decisions, and not just to make high-profile statements without ensuring practical impact.
- That the Young People's Forum had been re-established, with a dedicated officer working on its development.
- That there was a desire to develop the Council into one that was more child-friendly, with the possibility over time for the Young People's Forum to become a robust part of the democratic process.

- That wider work was underway to develop the County as a child-friendly county, and that the comments fed into that work.

It was emphasised that children were not a uniform group, and it was asked how the work would ensure that the voices of all children were heard, including the most vulnerable or those whose background or behaviour may mean they were taken less seriously. Concern was expressed about unconscious bias and how this could influence how some children were listened to, and it was noted that a similar theme appeared in the Our Bravery Brought Justice report, with the risk of offenders targeting children who were thought to be less likely to be believed. In response, it was noted that the voices of some cohorts were at risk of being heard more than others, and that this needed to be avoided so as not to under-represent those who were less prominent. It was emphasised that, going forward, the intention was to ensure that the voices of children from less prominent cohorts were heard, including looked after children, children open to children's services, and other relevant groups, to ensure wider representation in the work. It was confirmed that arrangements were already in place within children's services to listen to the voice of the child in all cases, although there were practical challenges associated with the work, and the Council was seeking to strengthen the approach because of the report.

It asked whether specific work was being done to address unconscious bias through training, including reminding those working with children of the risk of making assumptions and the need to recognise vulnerability at an early stage. In response, it was noted:-

- That specific work on unconscious bias within the education services had not yet been developed.
- There was a recognition that staff perceptions may be influenced by a child's profile.
- That the point was a valid one, and the matter would be further considered to respond positively.
- That the principle of reaching beyond the usual voices applied across the Council's areas of work, and that engagement needed to be ensured and that it reached a wider range of children, young people and communities.
- That social workers received training on unconscious bias as part of their qualifications, with additional training available on the subject.
- That the work of the Youth Justice Service continued to ensure that the voices of children and young people who received a service were heard, and that a financial bid was underway to try and appoint an additional officer to focus on this.
- Training requirements were becoming more complex, with employees expected to follow several courses because of the report. There was a need to prioritise and consider combining elements where practicable.
- That the input of scrutiny committees was relevant to the discussion on prioritising training and ensuring that it was realistic and effective.

- That elected members had already received training on unconscious bias, but it was intended to provide an opportunity for those who had failed or who wished to complete the training again.

It was asked whether it could be ensured that the door would be open for victims to receive support from the Council for years to come as trauma could affect individuals years later and, often, throughout their lives, recognising that not all victims wished to accept the offer at this time. In response, it was fully agreed with the point raised, noting that trauma could affect people for decades. It was stressed that the door needed to be kept open for the victims in the long term and that the point was one that should be made clear in the Response Plan to avoid any doubt about the continuation of the offer.

Concern was noted that Gwynedd Schools' Safeguarding Children Policy was a complex and comprehensive document, and that the Chair of the School Council was expected to sign it on behalf of pupils. It was noted that the document was not child-friendly or easy to understand for primary or secondary pupils, and it was asked why an accessible or easy-to-read version was not already available for children, stating that children should be able to view the policy and discuss it intelligently. In response, it was noted that the policy contained several elements and reflected national requirements to ensure that arrangements were clear and complete. It was elaborated that there was an intention to work with the Children and Young People's Forum on an abridged version, and to ensure that a children's version was available the next time the policy was submitted so that pupils could read, discuss, and sign it to show understanding, with the full document available to those who wished to read it.

The importance of ensuring that the contact details of the external member of the governing body for reporting concerns outside the school were visible and easily accessible to all. It was noted that it should be ensured that the details were on school websites and in other prominent places. Concern was noted about potential assumptions regarding who might be victims, stressing the need to ensure that the arrangements did not exclude boys and that the information should be clear to all children and parents. The importance of being able to connect quickly and easily when there was concern was noted.

It was asked whether pastoral care now existed in schools. In response, it was noted that pastoral care existed across the schools, and that pastoral support formed a significant part of the day-to-day work of education staff. It was emphasised that many teachers went the extra mile to support children and young people, and their families, alongside their teaching duties.

Work Stream 2: Managing Allegations and Concerns About Adults Working With Children

It was asked how the arrangements for managing allegations and concerns about adults had changed in practice. In response, it was noted:-

- Some changes had already been implemented, with further work to tighten up the systems.
- Arrangements had been added to ensure that all referrals were properly recorded, and that there was clear confirmation that previous referrals had been checked and considered.
- That the relevant information had been collected and analysed to ensure that decisions were made based on a full picture of what had happened.
- There was an intention to ensure that a social worker saw and spoke to all children involved in any type of allegation, noting that this had already begun, with more work to be embedded consistently.
- Practical challenges had arisen with some parents not satisfied with the approach, especially when the child, in their opinion, was not central to the allegation. The intention to continue with the principle was noted.
- That the work of talking to the child should always be done by a qualified social worker, rather than any other practitioner, to ensure a consistent professional standard.
- That this approach led to resource challenges for the department, and it was noted that a significant financial bid had been presented to strengthen capacity and increase the number of social workers, in the hope that the Cabinet and Council would support it.
- It had to be ensured that decisions on thresholds and criteria were not made by a single officer, and that the intention was to ensure joint discussion and decision-making.
- That it was intended to strengthen the multi-agency element, noting that arrangements were currently taking place in a more ad hoc manner and on an open access basis with the police.
- Discussions were continuing with the police on the best approach, noting that the police favoured open access, but that the Council was considering whether the arrangements could be formalised through more regular and structured meetings because of the report.
- That the action plan consisted of over 200 lines and a significant number were relevant to this area.

It was asked what evidence was there that this system was likely to prevent failures such as those seen in the past, rather than merely administrative changes. In response, it was noted:-

- That the term evidence was challenging in this context as it was too early to provide robust and measurable evidence that the changes to date had resulted in a more effective or more robust system.
- That several sources had provided recommendations over a recent period, including the child practice review, and those pointed to the same direction in identifying what was considered to be good practice.
- That the recommendations fitted and reinforced each other, and that all recommendations were implemented on them and were followed up.

- That some aspects of good practice were developing nationally, and that this may mean that national guidance would need to evolve over time, but it was noted that this was not a reason for local delays.
- That the recommendations applied to all authorities in Wales, but that the ability to implement some elements was resource dependent. Additional investment and resources were required to deliver some steps in practice.
- A specific example, which was to ensure a visit by a qualified social worker with all children involved in an allegation, required funding and recruitment, and it was noted that this was being driven forward locally through the submission of a financial bid and workforce planning.
- There were wider implications at a national level in terms of how authorities were funded and supported to fully implement the new expectations.

It was noted that improvements had taken place in terms of systems, but that there was concern that the cultural element had not been fully resolved. It was noted that the objectives of the Response Plan included establishing all the facts of the case and learning all the lessons, and it was noted that the Our Bravery Brought Justice report highlighted missed opportunities in a significant number of cases. It was noted that background information had been brought to the Council's attention at the time, and it was unclear why those matters had not been taken further. It was noted that legal counsel had been commissioned but had not been published, and it was noted that it would be useful to see work that could explain the reasons for the missed opportunities. It was noted that if the barrister's report could not be published for valid legal reasons, it should be ensured that other work in the same vein was commissioned so that it could be published.

It was asked what assurance was there that concerns were appropriately escalated when the risk was high. It was asked what the role of the second appointed safeguarding officer was, whether referrals would go to more than one safeguarding officer from now on, and how this would happen in practice. In response, it was noted:-

- That the Local Authority Appointed Officer (LADO) was already in discussion with other officers, and that this was part of the current procedure.
- That the Our Bravery Brought Justice report sets specific requirements in terms of ensuring specific training and supervision for the LADO.
- That supervision already existed, but the arrangements were now being tightened in the wake of the report.
- That threshold and criteria decisions were made by more than one individual, and that further work continued to refine some of those arrangements.

The need to keep capacity and appropriate funding central within the local authority to carry out safeguarding functions was emphasised. It was noted that there was confidence the Council could lead at a national level through this response, and it was noted that other authorities were looking at the work to learn from it.

It was noted that there was no price on child safeguarding, and that any request for additional resources should not be rejected based on cost alone. In response, it was noted that there had been a clear direction from the outset that the aim was to ensure the best possible arrangements, and that there would be a cost attached to that. It was noted that there were a significant number of requests for resources in this field, which was noted to be appropriate given the nature and scale of the work. It was elaborated that a formal decision on additional resources would be made at the Cabinet meeting on 10 February 2026, and it was noted that currently there was no higher priority than this.

Enquiries were made on an update on the scrutiny investigation into safeguarding arrangements in schools. In response, it was noted that there had been delays, mainly due to the need to ensure that the voice of the child was central to the investigation. It was noted that there had been difficulties in trying to appoint a suitable provider to carry out specific work on hearing pupils' voices, and that this had been added to the timetable. It was elaborated that additional discussions needed to take place before a draft report was produced. It was confirmed that work was ongoing and progressing, but that a firm date could not be given to when the draft report would be submitted to the Committee as it depended on several factors.

Further information was requested about piloting new processes under Section 47 and Part 5 arrangements, including joint work with North Wales Police. In response, it was noted that the child practice review required assurances that decisions were made in collaboration with the police, and that those discussions needed to be formalised further. It was noted that discussions were ongoing regarding an arrangement whereby a daily conversation about cases could be held virtually, but it was noted that the police were not as keen to move to a more formal system as they favoured the current arrangement of open access. It was noted that the discussion on the formalisation of arrangements was ongoing, but it was confirmed that very close cooperation was already taking place with the police.

Questions were asked about suitability to work with children and, in particular, about transferable risk, where inappropriate behaviour by an adult towards another adult in a work setting such as a school may raise the question of whether that should be considered as a risk to children and therefore as an issue under Part 5 processes. In response, it was noted:-

- That the answer depended on the specific circumstances of each case, and that Part 5 applied to vulnerable adults and adults without capacity as well as children.
- That an arrangement to keep a record of all allegations under Part 5 strengthened the ability to see patterns and link information if further concerns arose in the future.
- Those specific situations, such as harm to a vulnerable adult, were Part 5 issues and raised questions about fitness to work.
- Some other scenarios were more complex and may fall mainly within disciplinary processes and human resource processes.

- That the term 'suitability' was being used more often in the discussions now, suggesting a shift in culture and focus when considering concerns.

It was suggested that there should be clearer mechanisms to ensure that issues arising through the Council's school disciplinary or human resources processes trigger Part 5 consideration where appropriate, to avoid a situation where only cases that reach social services are considered through a safeguarding lens. In response, it was noted that this was a complex area and that the question raised wider issues in terms of national guidelines. A willingness to go back and take a closer look at the arrangements was expressed with colleagues across departments.

A question was asked about the audit carried out on a two-year period to identify any concerns about persons in positions of trust, and it was asked whether the period was sufficient, and to what extent it could be certain that persons who should not be, were working with children. In response, it was noted:-

- That the investigation focused on referrals received over the given period, and that all referrals within that period had been cross-referenced against historical records to see if previous concerns existed, up to as far back as the records allowed.
- That the work therefore looked well beyond two years in terms of the history of persons where a referral had occurred, although the sample was based on the selected period of referrals.
- That the investigation could be extended further in terms of referrals if recommended by the Committee, but that would involve additional work.
- That the work had responded to the practical challenge in the report regarding the need to consider multiple referrals together in decision-making.

It was noted that an appropriate balance needed to be maintained, bearing in mind that teachers were people with lives outside of work. A particular concern was identified about culture in a school where bullying, 'misogynistic' language or unprofessional language could continue unchallenged. The importance of training for staff to call out unacceptable behaviour was emphasised.

It was asked whether hierarchy and job titles could lead to differences in how concerns were dealt with. In response, it was noted that the issue of hierarchy and power was a theme highlighted in the Our Bravery Brought Justice report, and that culture and power structures could facilitate the ability of strong individuals to control and defend their position, noting that processes, training and policies, as well as culture change, needed to work together to prevent this.

It was emphasised that the human resources procedure was the same for teachers, assistants, office staff and carers. It was noted that a practical difference arose in the case of headteachers as the chair of the school governors was their line

manager. It was noted that this was a major responsibility, and concern was expressed that not all chairs of governors, when stepping into the role, may be fully aware of the wider responsibilities, including disciplinary matters, supporting the headteacher, and dealing with sickness absence. It was noted that taking on a voluntary role to take on such complex responsibilities was a significant challenge. It was explained that the Welsh Government was considering school governance guidance with the intention that support would be stronger in the future.

Concern was expressed about governors at Ysgol Friars breaching the code of conduct, and members asked whether any action had been taken as a result, noting that it was difficult to have confidence in governance arrangements if there were no consequences. In response, it was noted that Ysgol Friars was now in a very different position to what it was two years ago, with a new governing body, a new chair, significant changes to the Senior Management Team, and a different culture. There was recognition of the hard work done recently, including the role of the interim headteacher.

Enquiries were made about the arrangements with the police, noting that complaints had been made but clearly at the time this had not led to action. Views were expressed that North Wales Police should review their arrangements in the same way as the Council. In response, it was noted that co-operation with the police had been excellent over the past two years, with concerns being addressed quickly, and it was noted that the co-operation was continuing. It was noted that the recommendations of Our Bravery Brought Justice report applied to several bodies, and the expectation was noted that the report would be considered by the police in the same way as the Council. It was confirmed that discussions had already taken place with relevant officers.

It was emphasised that several public bodies needed to review their arrangements, including the Welsh Government, the Regional Safeguarding Board, North Wales Police, the Council and the Health Service. In response, it was noted that there were specific recommendations for Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, with the understanding that work was underway to be implemented and that the Regional Board was monitoring progress.

It was emphasised that one of the biggest lessons was the need to think the unthinkable, and not to believe that this could not happen locally, making it clear that this had happened and that the current work aimed to ensure that it would not happen again. Concerns were raised about the role of power and influence within school structures, noting that staff tended to follow protocols but that concerns could hit a wall. The importance of professionals knowing when to escalate or take concerns further if they were blocked was noted.

It was noted that a review of school governance arrangements was underway and that this was welcomed. It was noted that work was underway to review the role of regional safeguarding boards and that this would likely consider the relationship

between the Regional Safeguarding Board, local authorities, health services and the police. It was noted that both reviews were due to report in the spring, and it was noted that it would be important for elected representatives to lobby the next government to put these issues at the top of the agenda, and while they may not be politically attractive, they were essential. It was elaborated that many of the recommendations related to national changes, and that there was a need to ensure that financial pressures and staffing resources were reflected in the way local authorities were funded.

Work Stream 3: Training and Policies

It was asked what kind of training a designated child safeguarding officer would have received in the period when the issues in question had been happening, and it was asked whether that would be consistent with the training of equivalent officers across the country. In response, it was noted that there was a network of designated officers across the country, with national contact arrangements and training opportunities, and it was noted that relevant training opportunities would have been available. It was emphasised that any individual appointed to a role was expected to be competent and skilled to fulfil it.

It was noted that the quality of recording concerns and records was key to ensuring that the voice of the child was heard. It was asked whether procedures were in place to ensure that safeguarding records were maintained to a standard, and who was monitoring this. It was further asked who would be responsible for providing training on minute-keeping, and for how long minutes would be kept. In response, it was noted:-

- That monitoring and quality assurance arrangements for minutes already existed, and that further work was being undertaken because of the child practice review to strengthen and consolidate those arrangements.
- The work included the development of one clear policy within children's services which specified what the monitoring and quality assurance processes were, with a view to submitting a draft to the Response Board soon.
- That an agreement had been signed to pilot the 'Magic Notes' system, with the intention of integrating it into the systems and using it across child and adult services.
- Further training for all social workers on record-keeping was to be provided to ensure standards were met, as well as work to clarify what should be recorded and what the national guidelines were.
- That there was an intention to provide specific mandatory training on the recording of allegations, but that a practical challenge arose as Social Care Wales was the owner of the e-learning platform. Discussions were underway about adding content or developing local content.
- That records of Part 5 allegations and child case files in the context of child protection matters should be retained for 75 years.

It was suggested that a role should be assigned to a designated officer to check and monitor the quality of records relating to child safeguarding. Concern was expressed about cases that had not been properly recorded in the past, and it was asked to what extent it was made clear that failure to properly record in safeguarding situations could lead to serious disciplinary consequences. In response, it was noted that the comment about setting a clear responsibility was accepted, and it was noted that a financial bid already existed to appoint a role that would partially respond to the concern, with a willingness to go back to include that specific function more clearly within the bid. It was noted that professional expectations were clear in terms of reporting to a standard within social service roles. It was explained that the relevant standards were set by Social Care Wales.

Enquiries were made about training on grooming, noting that patterns had been highlighted in the Our Bravery Brought Justice report and that it was difficult to understand why these had not been identified at the time. It was asked how such training would be included for school staff, Council staff and elected members. In response, it was noted that:-

- Work had begun to identify what was already available in terms of training, noting that specific training on grooming had not been consistently available for schools and the education workforce to date.
- Work was taking place in conjunction with children's services to determine appropriate training as well as a timetable for it to be delivered as soon as possible.
- There was a practical challenge in schools in terms of time and capacity to complete the increasing number of mandatory training sessions.
- A response had been submitted to the Welsh Government's consultation on INSET training, with the suggestion that at least one day of INSET training should focus on safeguarding issues. It was noted that training on the signs of grooming would be an integral part of this.
- The matter was being taken seriously, and the intention was to move quickly to secure the training.
- There had been no clear indication so far that the Welsh Government would provide a specific national training package on this for schools.

It was emphasised that anyone who comes into contact with children needed to be able to recognise the early signs and red flags when it came to grooming. In response, they noted that they fully agreed with this, and that information about grooming had already been included in the safeguarding modules for staff as an initial step. It was elaborated that this would not be a one-off exercise but long-term work to change culture and mindset.

It was asked whether something could be done to help families recognise signs that children may be being groomed. It was suggested that communication resources could be used to raise awareness among families and should be considered as a potential topic to discuss on the 'Mam, Dad a Magu' Podcast. In response, it was noted that the suggestion would be considered further.

The Cabinet Member for Education noted that the discussion had highlighted that where the powers lie in terms of demanding training was a key issue. It was emphasised that the education authority's ability to demand specific training was limited under the current arrangements, and that it would be easier and clearer if an education authority had more power to set requirements and timetables, and be able to monitor this.

The importance of governing bodies challenging appropriately was emphasised, noting that their role was to be a critical friend, and there was a need to challenge appropriately when there was concern about a leadership approach or a culture of power where decisions were not questioned.

It was asked how, through training, the confidence and ability to challenge could be included. It was noted that there were two risks in the Our Bravery Brought Justice report, namely the risk of harm to children, and the risk that professionals around them were unable to recognise what was happening or if they dismissed concerns. It was noted that there was a need to equip people to raise concerns not only about potentially harmful individuals, but also about professionals or colleagues who were not responding as they should, recognising that it was sometimes difficult to challenge colleagues or senior persons in the employment chain. The importance of fostering a culture where people in positions of power welcomed being challenged was emphasised.

In response, it was noted that this was a central theme in the report and a complex area, without a single definitive answer. It was noted that it would develop over time through a combination of training and culture change, with an emphasis on leadership, whistle-blowing arrangements, and ensuring that concerns and referrals were handled appropriately to build confidence in the process. It was confirmed that the discussion about safeguarding now took place daily across departments, with a higher level of awareness.

The Education Department was thanked for the work on the Response Plan and for the ongoing work. It was asked whether education policies could be accessed in one central place on the web for the benefit of scrutiny and for staff to be able to find them more easily. In response, it was noted that there were already specific sections on the website for policies. It was noted that new web pages had been created for the Response Plan, with the intention of including relevant documents there, as well as the minutes of Response Board meetings. It was elaborated that a package of model policies was provided every year to school governing bodies, but they were adopted by the individual school. It was emphasised that governors could encourage schools to place key policies online.

It was asked how the effectiveness of the policies and training would be tested over time, and how this would be measured. In response, it was noted that this was a challenging area, noting that the focus so far had been on putting the arrangements in place, and the next step was to develop measures to show what differences had

been made over time. It was noted that quantitative measures were easier, such as the number of staff who had completed specific training, but that measuring qualitative impact on children's culture and experience was more difficult. It was noted that further work needed to be done on this, with significant input from the Chair of the Response Board. It was explained that further workshops would take place to consider suitable measures.

It was asked whether there were examples of cases where training or the new arrangements had led to a decision being challenged or to people feeling more confident to challenge. In response, it was confirmed that there was a higher level of awareness around safeguarding, and that discussions and challenges around safeguarding take place regularly across the Council.

The Cabinet Member for Education noted concern about the sustainability of the awareness over a longer period. It was suggested that there could be a role for the Scrutiny Committees to monitor progress in coming years, including the possibility of conducting a scrutiny investigation or a task and finish group to look at how the arrangements were embedded over time. Hope was expressed that Our Bravery Brought Justice report would have influence nationally. It was emphasised that there was a need to monitor the implementation of national recommendations over time.

Work Stream 4: School Governance

It was noted that the role of governors was a difficult one and this was voluntary, and there was concern about the shortage of governors. It was noted that a full understanding of responsibilities could lead to fewer people being willing to take on the role, noting that the demands on governing bodies were enormous. It was noted that this tied into the debate about resources, noting that keeping some resources centrally enabled the Education Department to support governors. It was emphasised that the burden on governors had increased over decades as more responsibilities shifted to schools and governing bodies, away from local authorities and education departments. It was noted that more training and understanding was needed if the power was to remain with governing bodies, and it was noted that this was a wider issue that extended beyond Gwynedd.

In response, governors across the county were thanked for their work, and it was noted that additional training and support would be offered without waiting for national changes. It was stressed that further work needed to be done to strengthen governance in schools. It was noted that effective clerking was essential to governance, and that some schools were finding it difficult to recruit clerks, but that work was underway to rectify the situation. It was noted that the training of chairpersons needed to be reviewed and strengthened, and that there was an intention to strengthen the support for governors and chairpersons by expanding the

support team to two officers so that they could respond quicker when advice and support was needed.

It was asked what assurance there was that governing bodies were effectively challenging during meetings rather than just receiving information, and how this could be measured. In response, the importance of the role of governors to provide an appropriate level of challenge on work programmes and on the work of headteachers was noted, stressing the principle of being a critical friend and the need to strike the right balance. It was noted that the quality of clerking and the consistency of minutes were part of how elements of challenge and discussion could be identified and highlighted within meetings.

It was asked how the current governance system would have reacted differently to the Friars case. In response, it was noted that procedures and policies had generally been strengthened. It was noted that the Education Safeguarding Team visited schools to check the content of school policies and procedures, to ensure that they were consistent across the county's schools. It was noted that quality check visits were carried out to test the understanding of children, young people and staff of the policies, and to make the department more aware of the culture within the school as a whole.

The Cabinet Member for Education suggested that Estyn inspections needed to scrutinise the work of school governing bodies in greater detail, and that it was an issue that the Welsh Government should investigate further. The need to look further into the role of governors and to consider whether there was too much of a burden on them, and whether the role should be voluntary, was emphasised.

It was asked how school governance arrangements identified risk patterns over time and across cases. In response, it was noted that the members of the governing body could change from year to year and therefore record keeping was crucial to identify long-term patterns. It was stressed that the authority retained a copy of the records of any allegations and therefore this fed into the governance process. It was noted that while there was no specific procedure for looking at persons over a period of time within schools, that child safeguarding and human resources arrangements existed, and that the school and governing body were expected to have agreed policies and procedures in place to support them, and to ensure that the arrangements were fully appropriate.

The Head of Education's professional views were sought, in relation to a specific procedure for governing bodies to recognise risk patterns among school staff over time. In response, a view was expressed that such a procedure should not exist within the current system as governors were laypersons, and therefore this would ask too much of them. Views were expressed that some form of arrangement should exist, but that there was a need to wait for the results of the Welsh Government's consultation on School Governance arrangements before voicing further opinion.

It was noted that more general information would be provided to governing bodies in the future, as it was a recommendation within the child practice review report, to enable them to make decisions and have more meaningful discussions in relation to exclusions and attendance. Uncertainty was expressed as to whether this information would include information regarding referrals, as many schools in the county were relatively small, and it would be possible to identify children from the data.

It was confirmed that the procedure regarding concerns that did not meet the threshold of future support would contribute to the identification of risk patterns. It was stressed that there were limits in terms of what the authority could do under the current system until national changes happened. Hope was expressed that the national review into school governance arrangements would be an opportunity for the Government to use the findings of the Our Bravery Brought Justice report to make national changes.

It was noted that the Council had looked at creating a low-level concerns policy but that achieving this would be very challenging as it conflicted with national safeguarding guidance. The need for such a low-level concerns policy to be created nationally was emphasised.

It was asked whether it was possible to ensure that all governors within the county's schools received appropriate training before taking up the role. In response, it was noted that all Designated Safeguarding Governors received appropriate training every two years, and that it was a requirement for all governing bodies to provide a basic level of safeguarding training to the body as a whole.

Views were expressed that the level of safeguarding training available to the chairs of governing bodies was inadequate and should be higher. It was noted that governors had received a request to complete 'Prevent' training. In response, it was noted that the training was mandatory and separate to the basic safeguarding course that governors were required to undertake. It was emphasised that the level of training provided was determined nationally. A comment was received regarding the level of safeguarding training for chairpersons, stating that it was likely that higher training would be of benefit. It was stressed that these decisions were not made by the Education Department and the department did not have the power to change them.

Work Stream 5: Restrictive Practices

It was asked how the Council clearly defined when the use of restrictive practices was appropriate to prevent a child from doing something that posed a risk. In response, it was noted that a model policy on the use of restrictive practices was provided to schools, and that it was the responsibility of each governing body to carefully consider the policy. It was noted that the model policy contained specific points about when the use of restrictive practice could be justified, but it was noted

that the term 'restrictive' posed the main challenge as the interpretation could vary between individuals. It was noted that an external company had been commissioned to review the policy and guidance to assess whether they were as robust as possible and to look specifically at the clarity of the use of the 'restrictive' term, with a view to implement any recommendations immediately. It was elaborated that schools usually adopted what was provided, but that schools had the right to amend the policy if they wished to do so.

It was asked how the plan ensured that staff were confident and prepared to intervene when necessary to use restrictive practices to protect a child. In response, it was noted that:-

- Training on the use of restrictive practices was targeted to staff where it was deemed necessary, rather than providing it to all.
- Cases were referred to a specific forum to consider whether a member of staff needed training, often in the context of supporting children with additional learning needs or challenging behaviour.
- Not providing training to everyone was deliberate as it was thought that this could increase the risk of misinterpretation regarding when and how to intervene.
- That the term 'restrictive' continued to create an element of uncertainty, and that was part of the work under review.

It was noted that there was a need for transparency about historical weaknesses, noting that training methods on the use of restrictive practices had differed between education and social services, and this had been challenging. It was noted that these differences were being identified, and that work was underway to understand which system was most appropriate and to move towards a single training system in the future.

Concern was noted about organisational constraints, emphasising that the Council could provide a policy to a school, but it was up to the school to decide whether to adopt or change this. The need to push the issue forward at a national level was emphasised, with the suggestion of strengthening the statutory expectations in this area.

In response, it was noted that the authority had a role to supervise and monitor the use of restrictive practices in schools. It was noted that schools were expected to notify the authority each time restrictive practices were used, and that the information was analysed with the health and safety team to consider whether the methods were appropriate, whether the reporting arrangements were being followed, and what attention was being paid to the voice of the child. It was confirmed that parents were notified of such incidents. It was confirmed that a quality control procedure was in place, with the arrangements verifying whether restrictive practices had been used in each case within the county's schools and, if so, whether the system had been followed correctly; and if a record was not seen

through the system, it was noted that the procedure could not be considered to have been properly followed, leading to follow-up action to ensure compliance.

It was asked whether schools were required to notify the Education Department if they amended policies. In response, it was noted that the approach had become more robust than in the past, with a message for schools not to change the policy, and, if a change were to occur, to notify the authority. It was noted that policies were checked, although it would not be practical to check every word in every policy in every school every year. It was noted, however, that the work was focused on verifying key policies to ensure they were in line with the guidance provided.

An opinion was expressed that schools should adopt the model policies in full, or, if any adjustments were made, that they should draw the authority's attention so that the amendments could be considered and agreed. Councillors were asked whether a message could be sent about the importance of the role of governors in ensuring schools adhered to the policies provided by the authority. In response, it was confirmed that a message would be shared with councillors.

It was asked what support was available to members of staff following the use of restrictive practice, noting that this may cause concern for staff about whether they had crossed a boundary in a situation under pressure. In response, it was noted that a specific arrangement had not been established to offer this type of support, but that schools could obtain advice from specialist staff who support children with specific needs, and that this was often the driving force for training. It was noted that when an event involved a teacher, the headteacher would likely offer support and guidance, and, when this involved the headteacher, it could be referred to the chair of governors, echoing the concern about whether chairs had the skills to give support in complex circumstances. It was noted that health and safety officers could be involved in the matter when appropriate, and that contact would be made with the school if it became apparent that the incident had been particularly difficult. It was noted that the point was good and further consideration would be given to questioning whether the current arrangements provided sufficient support for staff who had to operate in difficult situations, particularly in special schools where the situation may arise more frequently.

Work Stream 6: Crisis Planning and Crisis Response

It was asked how crisis planning arrangements had been updated based on the lessons learnt from the Ysgol Friars case. In response, it was noted that work was underway to put a new crisis plan in place, and that a full understanding of what happened at Ysgol Friars was a core element of that work. It was noted that this was not based solely on reading reports, but that discussions had taken place with police officers to understand their experience, and it was noted that discussions would take place with staff who remained at the school to understand their experiences on the day.

It was asked what evidence there was that the response to a crisis was now faster and more decisive. In response, it was noted that awareness had risen across the county, but that work was currently ongoing to implement the new arrangements. It was noted that the challenge would be to put appropriate measures in place to demonstrate what would be different.

The importance of a quick and clear response in a crisis was emphasised, noting that delays in the Friars' case had added to the trauma. A view was expressed that the arrangements should be robust in terms of suspension while an investigation was ongoing, although it was recognised that this could create practical staffing challenges.

It was asked to what extent the work would involve guiding staff through potential scenarios to understand the course of action when a disclosure or concern arose, who should contact whom and when, and clarity around responsibilities. In response, it was noted that this would be the precise nature of the work once a robust plan had been drawn up and submitted to the relevant boards for approval. It was noted that there was a need to ensure that information reached everyone in the school, not just leaders, and that work was underway to map out the arrangements and include such scenarios in the plan and the associated training.

It was noted that some practical messages had already been given to staff in relation to prompt action, and that improvements had begun with arrangements. It was noted that this stream of work was likely to develop over time. The importance of training in this area was emphasised so that staff could practice and go through the different scenarios.

It was asked why training would be needed to call 999 when a child was at risk, stating that the principle should be the same as in any other situation. In response, it was confirmed that this was clear, but it was noted that responding to a safeguarding crisis included additional steps beyond the emergency call, including looking after the child, securing evidence, and considering on-site arrangements. It was noted that practical training, through scenarios and discussion, was an essential part of ensuring that people could function appropriately under pressure.

It was emphasised that staff and the school community needed to be able to talk about their experiences after an incident to build a full picture and aid recovery. Concern was expressed about situations where it was felt that concerns could not be discussed openly.

Work Stream 7: Supporting and Stabilising Ysgol Friars

Enquiries were made about the issue of the pension of the offender, expressing concern about the possibility of the person continuing to receive a pension, and it was asked who was responsible for this. An opinion was expressed that the fact

that this individual was still in receipt of his pension was unacceptable and immoral, but it was confirmed that Cyngor Gwynedd did not have the power to suspend a teacher's pension under the relevant arrangements. It was noted that the issue had been raised at a national level by the Member of Parliament, Liz Saville Roberts. It was noted that the matter had been brought to the attention of the relevant department, and the hope was expressed that the case would be considered as part of more extensive work on similar cases.

Attention was noted regarding the publicity of safeguarding arrangements, noting that the Ysgol Friars website included a prominent heading on safeguarding on the front page, while that was not consistent with other schools' websites. It was suggested that other schools should be encouraged to do the same. In response, it was noted that schools could be encouraged to do this, but that it was the responsibility of the governing body and the school to take practical action. It was further noted that governors should use their influence to ensure that safeguarding information could be easily found. It was noted that there should be a clear list on the Council's website of the relevant safeguarding details for each school.

It was asked what was being done to help children recognise and understand when grooming was happening to them. It was asked how educational provision, specifically at Ysgol Friars, including relationships and sexuality education, could be adapted to ensure that all children, including those who do not present as needing support, were given the knowledge and skills to recognise signs and raise concerns at an early stage. In response, it was noted that a national recommendation existed to strengthen the provision in the curriculum, and it was noted that the Council intended to move swifter and not wait for national changes. It was noted that Ysgol Friars was developing the pastoral curriculum, and that work was underway to strengthen the foundations, including the development of pastoral support and support spaces within the school. It was emphasised that work was underway to identify suitable providers and programmes to recommend to schools, with a view to building provision that developed year after year, starting early in an age-appropriate manner, so that children developed the skills to recognise harmful behaviour and to disclose concerns. It was stressed that the provision should be sustainable and not a one-off intervention.

A member expressed an opinion that education on grooming should be provided to children from a younger age, starting at the age of three.

It was asked whether individuals who failed to act appropriately, or who failed to share information in the case of Ysgol Friars, should be referred to the Education Workforce Council. In response, it was noted that discussions had already taken place with the Education Workforce Council, and that a meeting would be held the following week with the Chief Executive to discuss the report.

It was asked how the support for Ysgol Friars contributed to long-term stability rather than a temporary solution. In response, it was noted that the approach

focused on laying solid foundations, starting with the governing body and then the school leadership. It was noted that a permanent headteacher had not yet been appointed, but that the post was being advertised. It was noted that discussions with the governors and senior management team had been constructive and were moving in the right direction, but that it would take time. In particular, it was noted that the staff at Ysgol Friars had been through an exceptionally difficult time, and their experience needed to be recognised, noting that they had continued to provide quality education to pupils throughout, without standards slipping, and they deserved credit for this. It was noted that the support was ongoing, with regular contact, discussions with union representatives, and there was an intention to visit the school to give people the opportunity to share their views. It was noted that staff raised issues at an early stage, and the relationship between the authority and the school was strong, with a willingness to support and respond to requests.

It was asked what evidence there was that pupils' safety and well-being had measurably improved at Ysgol Friars. In response, it was noted that the demand for support had increased and the number of referrals had increased, and that this reflected a higher level of awareness and impact of the ongoing discussion among staff and pupils. It was noted that the school had appointed an additional member to the safeguarding team to increase capacity, enabling the deputy headteacher to focus on safeguarding alongside other responsibilities, recognising that safeguarding and inclusion often put significant pressure on the role of deputy headteachers in schools. It was emphasised that significant work still needed to be done to achieve a culture change across a large body of staff, pupils and the community, and this was a long-term journey.

It was asked to what extent they could be confident that more staff had been aware of the inappropriate behaviour that had taken place at Ysgol Friars, but who had chosen to ignore it. In response, it was noted that this type of theorising was unlikely to lead to a definitive answer, stressing that the case had been the subject of a police investigation and a child practice review, and that legal and procedural arrangements were available to respond to any misconduct or new evidence. It was emphasised that the Council took that responsibility seriously and followed the relevant arrangements. It was confirmed that further investigations by police were ongoing, but details of their scope and outcomes could not be given.

Questions were asked about the school's current ethos, and to what extent pupils were happy. In response, it was noted that this was a very challenging question, but it was noted that, based on the experiences of visits and discussions with the governing body and management team, pupils appeared polite, confident and positive. It was elaborated that a change in leadership and leadership style was inevitable after the departure of such an individual, and that this was a challenge for the school community, governors and staff, including ensuring support for staff to respond to challenging behaviour. Nevertheless, views were expressed that the school continued to thrive academically and pupils, on the whole, were happy despite what had happened, and the work of the staff and governors was recognised.

General Questions

Concern was raised that there was no acknowledgement in the Response Plan regarding the shortcomings of the Estyn report to the Council's education department, noting that the report had misled the Committee in giving the impression that the authority's safeguarding arrangements were sound when they were not. It was suggested that observations should be submitted to Estyn on the matter in order to receive a formal response from them, emphasising the reliance of committees on assurances from external bodies. In response, the intention to contact Estyn to request formal comments was confirmed.

It was asked who had decided not to include the Council-commissioned barrister's report among the appendices submitted before this Committee, and the legal grounds for not doing so. It was asked whether the document or a summary could be provided. In response, it was noted that external legal advice had been obtained, that the document related to human resources processes and, as an employer, it was not appropriate to share it at this time. It was noted that the recommendations had been shared, and that content like that discussed was reflected through the Child Practice Review report, but that the publication of the full document or a summary at this time was a step too far. It was noted that the position would be reviewed as things progressed, subject to legal advice.

It was asked whether a single senior officer had an overview of the Response Plan, and who was the clear point of contact for the public, parents, staff, members or the press to offer input or seek an update on progress. In response, it was noted that this had not been clearly stated in the Response Plan, and the member was thanked for raising the point. It was noted that the Chief Executive had overall operational responsibility, but that the magnitude of the Plan and the number of actions meant that supervision by a single person was challenging, and that additional supervision would be important. It was noted that the Response Board was involved in the arrangements, and that the Chair reported to the Cabinet regularly through public reports, with an expectation that the Chair would clearly highlight issues if progress was inadequate.

The need for clear accountability and oversight was emphasised to ensure that the county's safeguarding arrangements were robust.

It was noted that there had been a delay of approximately 13 months before independent internal investigations had begun, following Neil Foden's arrest. It was asked what lessons had been learnt from that period and whether the same decision to delay would be made again. In response, it was noted that it was unlikely that everything had been done perfectly in an unprecedented situation, with several things happening at the same time, and the ongoing police investigation. It was noted that there had been a clear message at the time to avoid action that could undermine the criminal process. It was noted that the child practice review was expected to be published within six months, but that process had slipped.

It was asked how certain they could be that a child had not been harmed during the 13 months before an independent check was carried out of the county's safeguarding processes. In response, it was noted that a piece of work regarding referrals during that period had come to conclusions regarding this.

It was asked how and when the actions taken so far, and those in place, would be communicated to parents. In response, it was noted that the communication of the work was challenging, and that work was underway to simplify and summarise the Response Plan as it was too complex to communicate effectively to the public without losing the necessary detail. It was noted that an easy-read version of the Our Bravery Brought Justice report had been useful and widely read, and that an accessible version of the Response Plan would also be a practical step to improve transparency and understanding.

Concern was expressed about when more information would be available regarding the barrister's conclusions and internal arrangements, noting that delays were worrying, undermined confidence, and could increase the cost to the public purse. In response, it was noted that a timetable could not be given at this time, due to the complexity of ongoing processes, and that dates that could not be guaranteed should not be given. It was noted, however, that learning and change was already taking place through the detailed Response Plan, but it was recognised that frustration persisted until the processes could be formally closed and more information shared.

General concern was raised about the pressure of the work on officers and Cabinet members, and it was suggested that such extensive response work could lead to slippage in other areas, including other safeguarding areas. In response, it was acknowledged that the work placed pressure on individuals. It was noted that individuals choose to focus on the work as it was a key priority, and that risk assessments were kept up to date to ensure appropriate prioritisation. It was noted that this could mean that some other things would move at a slower pace for the time being, noting that this was the reality of the situation.

The Chair noted comments, before concluding the discussion, emphasising that the Response Plan clearly indicated that Cyngor Gwynedd had learnt from the language of the Child Practice Review, but the key challenge now was to ensure that learning was embedded through clear accountability, operational challenge and continuous learning to ensure a real change in practice and culture, not just on paper. The importance of making different decisions when there was a risk was difficult, ensuring a concrete expectation for staff and Councillors to challenge concerns, and ensuring that this was actively supported by leaders at all levels. It was noted that there was a need for a system that made accountability visible, that welcomed professional and independent challenge, and that treated failures as opportunities to learn and improve rather than to hide them. It was emphasised that reinforcing and measuring these behaviours over time was essential to demonstrate that the lessons of the Child Practice Review had been truly internalised, leading to

better provision for child safeguarding and a lasting change in the organisation's culture and day-to-day decisions.

RESOLVED

1. To accept and note the report and work programme and request an update in 6 months.
2. To recommend to the Cabinet:

Work Stream 1: The Voice of the Child and Supporting Victims

- Measurable arrangements should be established that clearly show how the voice of the child and victims' experience directly influence decisions and outcomes;
- Long-term support for victims needs to be ensured without causing further trauma;
- Children facing challenges need to be given appropriate attention and unconscious bias should be avoided;
- It should be ensured that relevant information is easy to read and accessible to children.

Work Stream 2: Managing Allegations and Concerns about Adults Working with Children

- The arrangements for managing allegations and concerns should ensure that any doubt about the suitability of adults to work with children and vulnerable adults is assessed at an early stage, is appropriately escalated, and independently challenged, regardless of the status of the practitioner;
- Clear safeguards are needed for individuals who raise concerns;
- Incidents that do not directly relate to children need to be examined;
- Evidence should be gathered to show that change is taking place and to enable future scrutiny;
- Consideration should be given to extending the time period for the audit of Part 5 of the Wales Safeguarding Procedures allegations, by more than two years;
- Checks should be made that there is a mechanism in place to ensure, if necessary, that there is a transition from human resources processes to Part 5 procedures.

Work Stream 3: Training and Policies

- Policies and training should be rigorous and reviewed to support professional judgement and challenge;
- The need to evidence that training changes behaviour and decisions in practice, and is not solely a matter of attendance;
- Safeguarding records should be regularly reviewed and supervised by a specific officer to ensure that they are in accordance with the requirements;
- Grooming should be specifically identified in the training arrangements and given timely attention.

Work Stream 4: School Governance

- School governance arrangements should be strengthened to identify patterns of risk over time, ensure clear escalation pathways, and include an element of independent challenge or assurance;

- **Appropriate support should be offered to equip governors to appropriately challenge and identify patterns;**
- **Consideration should be given to the training provided for Chairs and Designated Safeguarding Governors.**

Work Stream 5: Restrictive Practices

- **It should be ensured that staff understand when the use of restrictive practices is appropriate, and that they feel confident and supported to take action to protect children;**
- **It should be ensured that the reviews focus on learning lessons rather than apportioning blame.**

Work Stream 6: Crisis Planning and Crisis Response

- **Crisis planning and response should be treated as a live process that was part of the safeguarding process and should be tested regularly;**
- **Clarity was required in relation to roles;**
- **Effective communication with staff should be ensured;**
- **Arrangements need to be continually reviewed to ensure that lessons learned from Ysgol Friars remain operational over time.**

Work Stream 7: Supporting and Stabilising Ysgol Friars

- **Supporting and stabilising Ysgol Friars should be used as a basis for whole-system learning, proving that stability has led to sustainable improvement in safeguarding and cultural change across schools;**
- **Schools should be requested to:**
 - **include information about their safeguarding arrangements prominently on their websites;**
 - **consider adapting their relationships education curriculum content to reflect what happened at Ysgol Friars.**

General

- **There was a need to ensure that there was an overview of the work streams in their entirety;**
- **To consider putting arrangements in place to ensure that the Council responds immediately and checks its systems when a significant concern arises which may be systemic in nature;**
- **Attention should be given to the arrangements for communicating information with parents and families to ensure effective communication;**
- **Consideration should be given to releasing as much information as possible to ensure transparency;**
- **The 2023 Estyn Inspection Report of the Council's Education Department should not be quoted or referenced in the Response Plan.**

The meeting commenced at 10:30am and concluded at 3:10pm

Chair

