

STRATEGIC SAFEGUARDING PANEL REPORT
2024/25

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The report gives an overview of the work of the Strategic Safeguarding Panel over the period April 2024 until March 2025, outlining the work undertaken by the Council themselves, and by the Council in partnership with others.

2. RESPONSIBILITIES AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- 2.1. The aim of the Strategic Safeguarding Panel is to ensure that appropriate arrangements and procedures are in place at a corporate level across the Council to ensure the safety of children, young people and adults. Since 2017/18 the Panel is also responsible for maintaining an overview of wider safeguarding issues across Gwynedd, such as Community Safety.
- 2.2. The Panel in turn is accountable to the Statutory Director of Social Services, who has the final accountability for safeguarding issues.
- 2.3. The Chair of the Panel is Councillor Menna Trenholme, Cabinet Member for Children and Supporting Families. The new Terms of Reference is seen in **Appendix 1**.
- 2.4. A Safeguarding Operational Group supports the Strategic Panel to implement its priorities and to deal with practical issues in its remit. This is an internal group of officers, with the safeguarding champion of each department serving on it, to ensure whole-Council ownership of safeguarding issues. The new Terms of Reference for the Safeguarding Operational Group is seen in **Appendix 2**.
- 2.5. Parts of the Council's performance in the safeguarding field are assessed in performance challenge meetings with the relevant Cabinet Members and by independent external inspectors as part of their work in assessing wider performance.

3. SAFEGUARDING POLICY

- 3.1. During 2023, a review of the Council's Safeguarding Policy was undertaken, which states how we intend to fulfil our statutory responsibilities for safeguarding children and adults who are at risk in accordance with the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act (2014). The policy is seen in Appendix 3.

4. PROGRESS AGAINST SAFEGUARDING ISSUES

4.1. Safeguarding Children

4.1.1. **7774** references were received to the children services in 2024-25. This is an increase of **8%** in the number of references compared with 7230 last year. It must be noted that this figure could increase as we cannot get a final figure until the end of May this year. Once again, these figures are higher than the figures prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.1.2. Once again, the workload on the service is overwhelming and the workforce has been extremely busy supporting our county's children and families. It is noted that the cases seen were much more intensive and complex than what was seen in the past, we intend to do work to understand the trends affecting the children services during 2025/26. At the end of the year a financial bid was agreed for increasing the department's workforce to ensure effective action with these directions.

4.1.3. There were also cases during the year of crime against children. Whilst legal proceedings and the courts are doing their work, it is important that, as social services, we consistently learn from these incidents through reviews and improve our services to ensure the safety of those who are most vulnerable in our community.

4.1.4. On 6 September 2023 the head of Ysgol Friars was arrested for crimes against female school pupils. He was found guilty in May 2024 of 19 charges, including 12 charges of sexual activity with a child and two charges of sexual activity with a child while in a position of trust. Five victims gave evidence to the court. He was sentenced to 17 years in prison. It is quite likely that other victims were abused by the former head, Neil Foden, as well, but there have been no further court cases to date. It is clear that safeguarding systems in this case have failed over a period of several years and that individuals have suffered as a result.

Since September 2023 a lot of work has gone on to consider and modify the safeguarding arrangements the Council has. The Council's safeguarding policy and the procedures of the Strategic Safeguarding Panel together with the Safeguarding Subgroup were reviewed and presented to the Council's meeting. A Former Director of Social Services was commissioned to carry out a desktop review of Social Services' involvement with the individual over the period in order to understand if changes needed to be made to safeguarding systems. That review was shared with the Child Practice Review (CPR) established by the

North Wales Safeguarding Board under Independent Chair, Jan Pickles, to understand the circumstances of the whole matter, and to establish what lessons are to be learned in order to prevent similar cases in the future. A specialist barrister in the field of child safeguarding was commissioned to look at a specific part of what was raised in the court case and that was also shared with the CPR.

Although there was no specific connection, it is worth noting that the Education Scrutiny Committee decided to carry out a review of safeguarding arrangements in schools across Gwynedd. Work has begun and will continue during the year 2025-26.

It is expected that the Children's Practice Review will draw all the work together providing lessons to be learned and recommendations to the relevant organisations during the summer of 2025.

4.1.5. The Part 5 work is progressing and continues to increase. Part 5 relates to safeguarding concerns about practitioners and those in positions of trust, and these procedures set out arrangements for responding to safeguarding concerns about those whose work, either employed or voluntary, brings them into contact with children or adults who are at risk.

4.1.6. **82% (↑3%)** of child protection reviews were held within the statutory timetable during the year. The percentage of risk assessments submitted to Case Conferences which were considered as exhibiting quality in decision making remained high at **99%**.

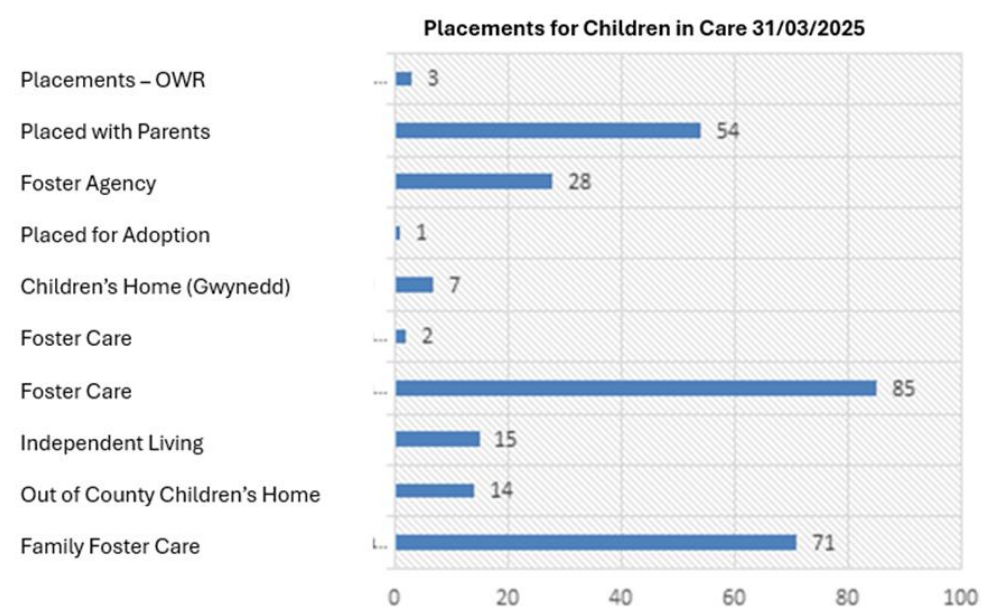
4.1.7. At the end of March, there were **280** looked after children. **43%** of the children who entered care during the year were young babies under the age of 1, with the majority of them having been on the Child Protection Register as part of safeguarding processes before entering care. Asylum seekers represent **2%** of the children who entered care this year.

- 12 children entered care under urgent arrangements (EPO / PPO) during the year, with 7 still in care.

- 21 children entered care under voluntary arrangements (Section S76), with 15 still in care on 31 March.

4.1.8. Of the total number of looked after children, **66%** were in foster placements, **21 (8%)** were in residential placements and **54 (19%)** were placed with their

parents. There was one child in an adoptive placement at the end of the period, with 15 young people living independently with support (3 of them are Asylum Seekers).



- 4.1.9. During 2024/25, unregistered placements arrangements (OWR) were used for 5 young people in care.
- 4.1.10. As noted last year, historically our use of unregistered placements arrangements has been very rare, and for short periods of a few days or weeks at most, until a placement identified for the young person was ready. However, the situation nationally is much more serious by now, with the majority, if not all authorities having to ensure that such an arrangement is available due to the lack of registered placements across the United Kingdom. This is especially true of teenagers with intensive and complex needs or who have experienced a placement breakdown due to challenging behaviour.
- 4.1.11. We strive to respond to the challenge by developing our own residential provision through the Small Group Homes Scheme, which is a priority in the Council Plan 2023-28. The three properties were purchased in 2024/25, and the first home is now operational. In addition, our Placements Commissioning Strategy notes that placements adequacy for looked after children is a priority and we have a clear strategy to recruit foster carers through the Foster Wales Gwynedd Service.

4.2. **Safeguarding Adults**

- 4.2.1. **750** Adult reports were received during 2024/25, this was an increase from the **719** reports received during 2023/24. On average, **91.8% (↓2.2%)** of the initial **126** enquiries from safeguarding referrals have been completed within the statutory period of 7 days.
- 4.2.2. Although it was not possible to identify a trend in the reports received, most of the reports related to allegations of physical abuse and neglect.
- 4.2.3. From the reports of Adults at Risk received, the risk was managed in **98.9% (↓1.1)** of the cases.
- 4.2.4. The type of Adults safeguarding reports received become more complicated annually and we saw that completing the **126** enquiries within the statutory timetable of 7 days became increasingly difficult. It was decided to provide a temporary resource to work with the Safeguarding Officer to ensure that it is possible to complete all the enquiries within the timetable. The additional resource will also help to ensure that safeguarding is included in the work to remodel the front door to services.
- 4.2.5. Regular visits were undertaken to monitor the county's nursing and residential care homes. A small number of providers have been under the 'Escalating Concerns' procedure due to various reasons, these most often include lack of management, documentation problems and lack of overview. The work of monitoring the domiciliary care provision across the county has commenced. The work of the Quality Assurance Officers is prioritised based on safeguarding reports or concerns raised by the workforce/families.
- 4.2.6. Concern about the DoLS service (Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards) remains. A small number of individuals are on the waiting list for up to 3 years. At the end of March 2024, there were **356** waiting for a DoLS assessment. The individuals must be prioritised according to risk. 100 of those on the waiting list are individuals living in supported accommodation and there is a need to make an application to the Court of Protection to deprive these individuals of their liberty.
- 4.2.7. A successful bid was made to employ two Best Interest Assessors on a permanent basis. It is hoped that this significant investment will be conveyed in the 2025/26 data.

- 4.2.8. An additional grant was received from the Senedd to support the work, and the money will be used to commission an agency to undertake many assessments.

4.3. Education

4.3.1. In 2024/25 the Designated Lead Officer for Safeguarding in Education has visited 62 schools to check safeguarding arrangements, policies and procedures. This closes the circle of having visited every school in the last 18 months. A new cycle of visits has started since January 2025 where it is intended that all schools receive a safeguarding quality visit within a one-year cycle. Almost all schools visited are 24/25 compliant with appropriate safeguarding arrangements. Of these visits, 2 schools have received a second visit in order to check aspects such as arrangements for recording attendance / absence and the inclusion of Safeguarding posters.

4.3.2. An Annual Safeguarding Review is completed by every school annually. The latest findings demonstrate:

- **94% (↑2%)** of the “Main Safeguarding Persons” in schools had received specific safeguarding training during the past two years;
- **85% (↑1%)** of Designated Governors in Gwynedd schools had also received the relevant training for their role in the last two years;
- **97% (↑2%)** of Gwynedd Schools had introduced Basic Safeguarding Training to all staff before the end of the Winter term;
- **100% (remains the same)** of Gwynedd Schools noted that they were confident that all school staff and volunteers know what to do if a child should disclose information on abuse.

4.3.3. Since September 2024, the Designated Lead Officer for Safeguarding in Education (SADDA) has conducted:

- 2 Safeguarding training sessions for designated Safeguarding Governors and Chairs
- 11 basic safeguarding training sessions (Supply teachers, occasional staff etc.)
- 11 Designated Safeguarding Person training sessions.

In addition, the Designated Lead officer has held training sessions for supply teachers, early years staff, the education modernisation team and Additional Learning Needs (ALN) staff.

4.3.4. Following a regional effort to review the Reasonable Force Policy for schools, the example policy has been shared with schools for the Governors to adopt it.

4.3.5. By now, the new Safeguarding and Well-being Service has been established within the education department. There is a leader and two officers supporting schools with safeguarding matters, as well as supporting schools with groups of vulnerable pupils.

4.3.6. The Safeguarding and Wellbeing Team has provided a simple flow chart on how to respond if there is a safeguarding concern as well as a flow chart on how to respond to allegations against staff. It is possible for the schools to enter the details of the school's Designated Person as well as the chair. These posters are available for schools to display for the use of Governors, staff and parents. In addition, a new safeguarding poster template has been shared with schools for them to display around the school, in reception and on their websites. This poster contains details of the designated safeguarding person, the deputy designated person and the Chairman as well as how to contact each. The training of Staff, Designated Person and Governors has been modified so that all the above information is included as well as the duty of the Designated Governor to check that the school uses them.

4.3.7. At the end of March 2025, there was a total of **269 (↑30%)** children receiving their education at home, through parents' choice. this figure includes 135 children who have historically been on the register and 134 new since September. Not all children on the register have previously been registered at a school, with some moving into the County but not wanting to register at a school and others making the decision very soon to be taught at home from the statutory education age.

4.3.8. The main reasons for a parent's choice to homeschool is their lifestyle/ideology but over-anxiety and mental health problems are on the rise. We managed to maintain constant contact with the majority of these families with a small number refusing any contact (in accordance with their rights).

4.4. **Domestic Abuse**

4.4.1. There is good co-operation between the Council and the relevant organisations, and efforts continue to promote the importance of reporting and identifying signs of domestic abuse. Following an application prepared by officers from the Corporate Support Department, the Council received a 'White Ribbon' accreditation in May 2022. The accreditation ensures that organisations use a strategic approach to put an end to violence against women, by changing the

culture and raising awareness. There is close co-operation between Community Safety and Corporate Support to monitor and report on the action plan.

- 4.4.2. A recent example of this work was the 'Bystander Intervention' training sessions for Council staff. This was provided by the Welsh Government, with the aim of helping individuals to deal with potentially harmful situations such as sexual harassment, giving them confidence to have discussions with friends and colleagues about these matters. The sessions were held on last year's White Ribbon Day, and more sessions have been arranged for staff in July 2025.
- 4.4.3. The Gwynedd and Anglesey Community Safety Partnership (CSP) is responsible for commissioning Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHR) in Gwynedd. During the past year, one review was published and one was presented to the Home Office for approval. Unfortunately, a new review had to be commissioned following a death during Summer 2024. This review is currently on hold until the criminal case has been concluded. We are continuing to implement and monitor the recommendations from the reviews that have already been completed.
- 4.4.4. The CSP will be working with the Regional Safeguarding Board in any DHR case in the future, following the introduction of the new Single Unified Safeguarding Review (SUSR) process in Wales. This process simplifies the previous arrangement by combining the current Adults Practice Review, Children's Practice Review, Mental Health Homicide Review, Domestic Homicide Review and Offensive Weapons Homicide Review processes.
- 4.4.5. The focus recently has been on responding to the learning from the DHRs that have already been completed, and the recent statistics which show that the deaths of victims through suicide was higher than homicide. A bid for funding was prepared by the NHS Wales Executive Suicide Prevention Programme. With this funding, a multi-agency workshop facilitated by renowned experts in this field was held to raise awareness and give confidence to professionals to ask the difficult questions when they suspect that individuals are victims of domestic abuse.
- 4.4.6. This grant also made it possible for us to order a large number of safety resources and information about support to ensure that we are able to do more engagement work with the public. We will be working with the Police and the regional support service DASU (*Domestic Abuse Safety Unit*) on a pilot project to conduct 'drop-in' sessions. Our aim is to try to increase the likelihood of being able to intervene sooner.

- 4.4.7. We continue to share information regularly regarding the 'Live Fear Free' Helpline and 'Clare's Law', which gives people the right to know whether their current partner or previous partner has any previous history of violence or abuse.
- 4.4.8. Nationally, a lot of discussion and attention has recently been given to matters relating to online influences, toxic masculinity and the impact on boys and young men. This resulted from the *Netflix* drama 'Adolescence'. Six training sessions have been arranged during the Summer for Education staff and the Youth Service by Michael Conroy / Men at Work CIC. The purpose of this training is to support professional workers to facilitate a constructive dialogue regarding healthy relationships, gender stereotypes, online influences and the impact of behaviours on women.
- 4.4.9. By now, the Domestic Abuse e-module is mandatory for all members of staff. It is vital that the workforce receives the training to ensure that the Council is doing everything within its ability to support individuals and to raise awareness. 'Ask and Act' training is also promoted to give staff confidence to help individuals experiencing violence, domestic abuse or sexual violence. **59.9 %** of Council staff (including Permanent, Occasional and Fixed-term staff) have completed the training.
- 4.4.10. We must remember that not all Council staff members have access to the Council's IT systems, and this creates a barrier. The Corporate Support Department is looking at the induction programme to try and ensure that everyone completes the e-modules in the first days of starting their job.

4.5. Crime

- 4.5.1. The year's data to date for 2024/25 shows an increase of **11.5%** in Stalking and Harassment offences, compared to the same period in 2023/24. North Wales Police, as well as other police forces across the UK, have been tasked with creating a profile problem focusing on Stalking offences, to better understand the matter.
- 4.5.2. The level of Sexual Offences recorded to date in 2024/25 in Gwynedd has seen an increase compared to 2023/24. There can be significant variations in crimes reported from week to week, partly because of reporting on historical offences. From the 163 suspects in sexual offences between April and December 2024, over 90% were men.

- 4.5.3. Acquisitive offences include the categories of Residential Burglary, Business and Community Burglary, Theft, Vehicle Crime and Thefts and Handling. Residential Burglary and Business and Community Burglary are exactly the same this year as last year, with reductions seen in the number of Vehicle Crimes and Theft and Handling. Only Theft has seen an increase to date in 2024/25, however this is only equivalent to one additional incident only in comparison with last year.
- 4.5.4. Antisocial behaviour in Gwynedd has seen a reduction to date of **-8.8%** in 2024/25, compared with the same period in 2023/24. This equates to over 150 fewer incidents being reported to the Police.
- 4.5.5. The Serious Violence Duty came into force nationally in January 2023. The duty makes it a requirement for specified authorities to work together to prepare and implement a strategy for preventing and reducing serious violence in the area. The North Wales final Strategy was published in January 2024. The Council has been part of this work since the beginning and continues to be part of the Regional Steering Group to implement the Duty. Further information is available here: [Serious Violence Duty | North Wales Police and Crime Commissioner Officer <https://www.northwales-pcc.gov.uk/cy/dyletswydd-trais-difrifol>](https://www.northwales-pcc.gov.uk/cy/dyletswydd-trais-difrifol)
- 4.5.6. As part of the duty, the Partnership received £82k of funding for preventative and early intervention projects to reduce serious violence by children and young people. Every element of this work was completed successfully by April 2025.

4.6. **Modern Slavery**

- 4.6.1. Modern slavery spans several types of exploitation, namely labour, criminal, sexual exploitation and domestic slavery. In North Wales, Modern Slavery cases in the area mainly relate to drugs exploitation, where the victims are often young males who are forced to trade drugs, usually through county lines. Regionally, promoting contextual safeguarding to work with children and young people at risk of exploitation and/or modern slavery is a priority within the North Wales Serious Violence Strategy.
- 4.6.2. The Police is raising awareness of Modern Slavery amongst authorities and businesses across the region, and conducting regular visits to hotels and holiday sites, as well as providing literature in sexual health surgeries and clinics.

4.7. Counter Terrorism

4.7.1. Cyngor Gwynedd holds a Public Places Group: Preparedness to Protect and Safeguard, and is also a member of the equivalent regional groups. The purpose of the Group is to:

- Respond to the new statutory duty Safeguarding / Martyn's Law which will be implemented in the next 24 months. The new legislation will ensure that the public will be better protected from terrorism, by making it a requirement for some public locations and events to prepare and be ready to keep people safe should there be an attack.
- Collaborate with organisations to provide effective and efficient protective security arrangements in Gwynedd;
- Provide an integrated security approach, that corresponds with the national standards and guidelines, to identify and provide proportionate actions to keep communities safe in Gwynedd;
- Improve and support the preparedness to safeguard and protect in accessible public locations in Gwynedd.

4.8. Prevent

4.8.1. **26.9%** of Council staff (including Permanent, Occasional and Fixed-term staff) have completed the Prevent e-learning training. The Home Office has created a new training package for Prevent, and the e-module is mandatory for the whole workforce by now. The above figure shows that there is work to be done in terms of increasing the number of people who have completed it, but it is important to remember that not every Council staff member has easy access to the Council's IT system, which creates a barrier.

4.8.2. However, in the past year, the Home Office has also published a new package of resources which allows us to prepare bespoke face-to-face training sessions. Welsh-medium resources are expected soon and once these are available, we will go ahead to organise pilot sessions. The ability to conduct our own sessions will ensure that training can be provided to officers who have no access to the e-learning portal.

4.8.3. The Council undertakes a quality assurance process annually with the Home Office, to ensure that we meet our statutory requirements under the Prevent duty. In 2024, the following strengths were identified by the Council:

- The Council takes an active part in the regional Prevent Delivery Group which works jointly to deliver Prevent duties.

- The Council's Prevent officers have taken long strides in working to manage threats and risks in relation to radicalisation during the last reporting period and beyond.

4.8.4. As a result of this process, the Council received two recommendations, namely:

- Develop a policy for hiring venues to reduce the opportunities for radicalists to influence, and this should include briefs for relevant staff members in relation to due diligence.
- Develop a Prevent training strategy, to include provision tailored according to staff roles and cohorts.

4.8.5. In response, a corporate policy for venue hiring is in the process of being drafted, and once the Welsh training resources are available, we will be in a position to implement a new training scheme. The Strategic Safeguarding Panel will focus on these over the next period.

4.9. Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)

4.9.1. The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) is responsible for processing criminal checks. The purpose of DBS checks is to help employers make safer recruiting and licensing decisions, although the check is only one part of the recruitment process. When the check has been processed and completed by the DBS, the applicant will receive a DBS certificate.

4.9.2. The Operational Group has undertaken some significant work to check, challenge and revisit the corporate procedure in respect of the DBS. As a result, Departments now have greater ownership of the DBS procedures and this has transformed how the Operational Group reports on its conformity on departmental disclosures.

5. WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

5.1. Although the Strategic Safeguarding Panel focuses on corporate responsibilities regarding safeguarding issues within Gwynedd, it also receives information and guidance via Regional Safeguarding Boards for Safeguarding Vulnerable Children and Adults working across north Wales. These are Statutory Boards with cross-agency membership and specific statutory and legal responsibilities. The Council is a member of these Boards and contributes to implementing their plans. Further information

regarding the work of the Boards can be seen here - <https://www.bwrdddiogelugleddcymru.cymru/>

5.2. The Gwynedd and Anglesey Community Safety Partnership has also shown that working in partnership across county borders is proving to be a success. The Partnership's work in areas such as Atal/Prevent is essential if the Panel is to ensure the quality of safeguarding arrangements in Gwynedd.

5.3. Several organisations have a statutory duty to be part of the partnership, including Local Authorities, Police, Probation Services, Fire and Rescue Service and the Health Board. Information on all aspects of community safety that the Council deals with is on our [website](#).

6. THE FUTURE

6.1. In terms of the Panel's priorities for the coming year, it is intended to concentrate on the following priorities:

- Understand and learn lessons from Practice Reviews published during the year.
- Implement all recommendations that come from Practice Reviews published during the year.
- Completing an internal audit on the awareness and understanding of the Council's workforce of safeguarding systems and how to refer.
- Ensure that the Council's workforce has completed the mandatory and statutory training courses in safeguarding.
- Promote the revised Safeguarding Policy among all Council staff.
- Ensure that the Designated Persons understand their role and take it seriously.

APPENDIX 1: Gwynedd Safeguarding Strategic Panel Terms of Reference

APPENDIX 2: Terms of Reference of the Gwynedd Safeguarding Executive Group

APPENDIX 3: Gwynedd Council's Safeguarding Policy