

ITEM 6 - QUESTIONS

Questions by Elected Members

(1) Question by Councillor Dawn Lynne Jones

I am aware that a full review was initiated on Derwen services back in 2024 due to concerns about the increasing number of children waiting for access to or for the services of Derwen. I wonder if the cabinet member can give an update on the results of the review by now, and indeed, on Derwen's situation.

Response - Cabinet Member for Children and Supporting Families, Councillor Menna Trenholme

A decision was made to carry out a review of the Derwen Service at the Management Board on 7th November 2024. As the Management Board includes Ynys Môn, and the Health Board is an integrated part of the services in both local authorities, the review runs jointly across the two counties.

After deciding to proceed with the review, an application was submitted for regional funding to hire external support to lead the process. We successfully secured funding for this purpose and conducted a tendering process to commission the work. An external consultant was appointed at the end of February 2025 with a work program to run from May to September 2025. Due to circumstances beyond the control of the two services, the work program has been delayed, and the review is now anticipated to be completed by the end of December 2025.

The scope of the review includes considering the current access criteria, analysing the current arrangements of the service, understanding the needs of children and their parents, understanding stakeholders' expectations and consideration for the design of the service for the future.

The final report will be presented to the management Board in the first instance and the work will be included on the program of the Care Scrutiny Committee.

It should also be noted that internal research work is ongoing to look at Gwynedd's population trends, including the number of births, the current population of children, as well as the number of disabled and neurodiverse children. The aim of this work is to determine whether the number of disabled children and young people is rising despite a decline in births in Gwynedd since 2012, and to explore the reasons behind this trend.

The work will also consider the ability of social services and the Education Department (Additional Learning Needs) to meet the needs over the next twenty years. The work will follow the pattern of the [Llechen Lân](#) report on social services for older people for the future published in autumn 2024.

(2) Question by Councillor Rhys Tudur

Given that during this year the Council has abandoned the procedure of numbering areas on waiting list application forms which has resulted in the loss of important data, to what extent were consultations, impact assessments, notices to councillors and public

reports carried out to justify the decision so that it is transparent, balanced and democratic?

Response – Cabinet Member for Housing and Property, Councillor Paul Rowlinson

I would like to refer you to the responses I gave to the similar questions raised in the Full Council meetings in July and March, where I explained that we have not lost important data at all. On the old application form, social housing applicants were asked to note the areas where they would like to live, placing them in priority order. Because many applicants chose to complete the form without prioritising their areas, and as giving priority had no part to play in the allocations process, it was decided that there was no purpose in continuing to ask people to prioritise areas. The application form was amended in accordance with that decision. This is an operational, not a political, matter and there was no impact on the public apart from simplifying the process for them.

(3) Question by Councillor Gruffydd Williams

Following the housing department receiving advice via Cyfeillion Llŷn from the Welsh Language Commissioner noting the ability to use the Welsh language as an allocations policy consideration and following recent attempts to build a large number of social housing in Welsh-speaking areas such as Nefyn, how enthusiastically and quickly will this Council be including the Welsh language as one of the considerations of the allocations policy?

Response – Cabinet Member for Housing and Property, Councillor Paul Rowlinson

Cyngor Gwynedd's Common Housing Allocations Policy and our Housing Action Plan plays a key part in the battle to keep the Welsh language alive in our communities. Both the influx of non-Welsh speakers and the outward migration of Welsh speakers threaten its prosperity as a community language. The strong emphasis given to a local connection in the Allocations Policy ensures that the vast majority of homes are allocated to local people.

But the outward migration of Welsh-speakers is much more of a threat to the language. It is a sad fact that over half of us here in Gwynedd cannot afford to purchase a home, and even higher in some areas. Private rent levels are also high, therefore there is a need for social housing for those who cannot purchase or rent on the market. I strongly believe that we have a right to live at home. This is a core matter to us. Some choose to move away, but no-one should be forced to leave as a result of not being able to afford to live in their habitat. And there are over 4,400 people and families (over 2,200 applications) on the waiting list.

Therefore, as we are all aware, more social housing need to be built in all parts of Gwynedd. The Housing Action Plan sets the aim of building 700 by 2029, through collaboration with our housing partners, and I'm pleased to say that we are on track to achieve this goal.

The Allocations Policy places a strong emphasis (the strongest in Wales) on a local connection, with two levels –a Gwynedd level and a community level. As a result, 97% of homes are allocated to local people with a Gwynedd connection and 60% to people in the same community. The criteria in the policy safeguards individuals who are local to Gwynedd as far as reasonably possible.

You are correct to note that the allocations policy does not specifically include the language as one of the considerations. You refer to the legal advice commissioned by the Welsh Language Commissioner. But the Council and its partners must attend to wider legal matters in regards to practical execution of the provision in a way which meets other requirements and duties.

The Housing Act 1996 places a legal duty on the Council to give reasonable priority to the applicants in most need and it defines these. We must also give “due regard” to Welsh ministers’ guidance. One part of the Guidance (3.69) allows “sustaining Welsh-speaking communities by giving priority to those in housing need with a local connection to the area.” That is exactly what we are doing, and the emphasis we place on the local connection is one of strongest that can be seen in Wales and goes as far as possible in what can be included.

The Allocations Policy places social housing applicants in bands and then within that band a priority is given to applicants (or family members) who have lived for five years or more in the Community Council area in question. This means that an applicant who has the same level of housing need but also has a community connection would be given higher priority than an applicant without a community connection. Should any priority be given to an applicant’s ability to speak Welsh, this would have to be given after these priorities, namely the level of need, Gwynedd connection and community connection. Because of this, it is unlikely that it would make much of a difference.

The percentage of Welsh-speakers who live on social housing estates is high. Recently, we have asked housing associations to conduct language surveys on their new social housing developments. They found that 90% of residents could speak Welsh, in wards where the average percentage of Welsh-speakers is 76%, which is 14% higher. Social housing can help to strengthen the language by providing affordable homes to local people, a high percentage of whom speak Welsh, and help them stay in their habitat.

Furthermore, there are a number of good reasons for not changing our current policy.

As a Council we have a duty to serve everyone in Gwynedd, the non-Welsh speaking minority as well as the Welsh-speaking majority. Giving preference to Welsh speakers would risk alienating residents who have lived all their lives in Gwynedd but cannot speak Welsh, and in doing so, creating a ‘second class of residents based on language only.

We have consulted with our partners, the housing associations, those who build and manage the homes. And the answer is clear: all support the policy as it is, a policy which prioritises the people of Gwynedd and opposes the principle of discrimination on the basis of the language people speak. If we were to follow that path, there is a risk that some would refuse to operate in Gwynedd anymore.

The Council must execute the policy fairly and consistently and the legal advice we received stated that the practicality of its introduction would be extremely complex. Certainly, it would create difficulties in terms of how to define and objectively assess an

applicant's and their families' language ability and conduct a review every year as is needed.

Those are the reasons why I believe the Common Housing Allocations Policy is fit for purpose and does not need to be changed for now. That being said, the Homelessness and Social Housing Allocation (Wales) Bill is currently making its way through the Senedd. If it becomes law, Welsh Government will publish new guidance and we will certainly be reviewing our policy at that time. It would give us the opportunity to look at social housing allocation arrangements in other countries where minority languages are under pressure. Cyngor Gwynedd has many other innovative policies to promote the use of the Welsh language in the county, e.g. the new language policy in the education field. The Allocations Policy, as well as the Housing Action Plan makes a valuable contribution towards ensuring we have the right to live at home and strengthens the Welsh language in our communities in Gwynedd.

(4) Question by Councillor Huw Llwyd Rowlands

Does Cyngor Gwynedd consider that the culture of Ffordd Gwynedd, which is to provide the best possible service to the residents of Gwynedd, is operating efficiently and successfully in all parts of the Council? My experiences suggest that it is not.

Response – Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Councillor Llio Elenid Owen

The annual report presented to the Cabinet meeting on 8 July 2025 shows that Gwynedd Council recognises that the Ffordd Gwynedd culture and the “way of working” are moving in the right direction, with several examples where departments are taking proactive steps to promote the plan's objectives.

However, the report is also honest about the fact that progress and efforts to embed the culture remain mixed, and there are variations between individual departments and across the Council as a whole.

The report emphasises that the role of technology, training, and continuous evaluation is key to the success of this culture, but there are some areas where best practices have not yet been fully embedded. For example, there is a need to extend basic training on the “way of working”, embed the practice of continuous evaluation, and promote ownership of performance among all Council staff.

There is a specific plan within the work programme regarding customer care, and the Cabinet also approved a new Customer Service Strategy at its meeting on 8 July 2025. The work programme of this strategy will place particular emphasis on responding to enquiries and correspondence from residents and members, with the aim of seeing improvement in the Council's performance.

If anyone receives a substandard service, they are encouraged to bring it to our attention through the relevant processes so that we can identify exactly where those weaknesses are and address them.

(5) Question by Councillor Linda Morgan

In view of the decision of the North Wales Safeguarding Boards to delay the publication of the CPR report last week, can the Leader give an update on the current situation with regard to the CPR Please

Response – The Leader, Councillor Nia Jeffreys

Thank you to the Councillor for the timely question and for giving me the opportunity to share the available information with the Council.

I was disappointed that the Regional Safeguarding Board was unable to proceed with publishing the report on 24 September, as we had hoped and expected. Of course, the disappointment and pain were even greater for the victims and survivors. I cannot imagine how challenging the wait for publication must have been for them, and I am truly sorry that this delay has prolonged their pain and anxiety.

We have formally contacted the Safeguarding Board to request an explanation, but unfortunately, we still have no information regarding the reasons for the delay. I can assure the Council that Cyngor Gwynedd had no role in the decision and we are eager to see the report published as soon as possible.

I anticipate that the report will highlight failures to prevent the paedophile, Neil Foden, and that many of these failures will fall under the responsibility of this Council. It breaks my heart to think that our safeguarding systems at the time failed to protect children who should have been safe in their school.

Receiving the report will give us the opportunity to fully understand what happened, what lessons need to be learned and which systems need to be strengthened to ensure our children are as safe as possible in Gwynedd and across Wales. It will give us the chance to acknowledge our shortcomings and to apologise again to the victims, to the many others affected, and to the people of Gwynedd for letting them down.

Following the adoption of the Response Plan earlier this year, a Response Plan Programme Board was established to monitor and measure the progress of the Plan and to implement the recommendations. There are now seven main objectives for this Plan: 'Acknowledge', 'Apologise', 'Support', 'Establish', 'Learn', 'Improve', and 'Accountability'.

The Response Plan Board is chaired by Professor Sally Holland, with representatives from several external agencies acting as observers to ensure independent challenge of the Board's work. Four Cabinet Members sit on the Board, along with Council officers and representation from Ysgol Friars and the Secondary sector in Gwynedd.

I must emphasise that the adoption of the Response Plan and the establishment of the Response Plan Programme Board were not the beginning of the work. Several actions had already taken place beforehand, and much more remains to be done.

In her quarterly report to the Cabinet in July, Professor Sally Holland noted that positive progress was being made across the workstreams. That being said, there is still much more to do, and further recommendations are expected following the publication of the Child Practice Review (CPR) – we will accept all of them and implement them immediately. We will not shy away from our responsibility; everything must be done to safeguard the children of Gwynedd.

My thoughts remain with the victims, their families, and the entire community who have waited a long time to see this vitally important report.

(6) Question by Councillor Louise Hughes

Following the announcement last week that the report into Foden's repulsive, predatory behaviour will not yet be released, it raises the question of how effective this Council's whistleblowing procedures are. We are all tainted by this appalling state of affairs. Parents sending their children to our schools place their trust in Gwynedd Council to make sure they are safe. Withholding the findings of the report shuts down the rights of the victims, their parents and ordinary people who are justifiably angry at how this was allowed to happen over such a long period of time.

Why weren't the concerns raised in the past followed up and investigated under the Education Act 2002 for Safeguarding Children in Education - what reassurances can Gwynedd Council give that future safeguarding concerns will be treated seriously and actioned robustly?

Response – Cabinet Member for Education, Councillor Dewi Jones

Thank you for raising this serious matter. First of all, I would like to apologise sincerely to all those who have suffered as a result of the horrific acts of paedophile, Neil Foden, and emphasise that the safety and well-being of every child in Gwynedd are always our main priority.

You specifically ask why concerns raised in the past were not followed up under the Education Act 2002. An independent investigation was commissioned by the North Wales Regional Safeguarding Board to examine not only why systems that should have protected children did not work as they should but also the culture and arrangements that allowed such behaviour to continue unchallenged. Like many, I am also disappointed with the Regional Safeguarding Board's decision to delay the publication of the report. According to the Board, they need to consider their "legal obligations". I'm sure this has been a terrible experience for the children who suffered at the hands of the offender. I have not received any further information since being informed of this at the end of the day last Tuesday.

In terms of ensuring confidence for the future:

- Gwynedd school staff receive regular training on safeguarding, with clear routes to share concerns as a key part of it. The Education Department has established a new Safeguarding and Well-being Team which has enhanced our ability to respond in a timely manner to safeguarding concerns.
- The Education Department has new arrangements in place to log and trace cases that are brought to its attention. Our Whistleblowing policy has been updated and procedures strengthened so that staff, parents and pupils themselves can raise concerns in confidence.
- Governors and heads are accountable through annual safeguarding audits, despite the national practice being every three years. These visits include: checking safeguarding policies, checking dates and levels of training, checking practical safeguarding arrangements, questioning the designated safeguarding

person, staff and pupils about confidence levels and knowledge relating to safeguarding, checking the contents of the school's Safeguarding Arrangements Annual Audit and offering general support and guidance.

As Cabinet Member for Education, and a member of the Response Board, my role is to ensure that Cyngor Gwynedd acts appropriately and responds positively to any recommendations made during this process, and that lessons are learned so that safeguarding arrangements are strengthened. The Response Plan Board is chaired by Professor Sally Holland, and representatives from various external agencies attend as observers. In addition, four Cabinet Members, Council officers, and representatives from Ysgol Friars and the secondary sector in Gwynedd take part in the Board. In a report in July, Professor Holland said positive progress had been made so far with 32 of the 63 work tasks completed and a clear desire by the Council to deliver the remainder.

I would like to assure parents and carers that any safeguarding concerns raised today are treated with the utmost seriousness, promptly investigated, and robust action taken thereafter. We will tolerate nothing less.

The lessons of the past must shape the culture of the present. It is only by facing those lessons honestly, and by relentlessly strengthening our systems, that we can honour the trust that families place in us every day.

(7) Question by Councillor Richard Glyn Roberts

Considering:

1. That the cabinet member for finance, earlier this year, stated that the Finance Department was working on a policy on the use of discretionary powers to reduce council tax liability in relation to the premium (in the case of property used for self-catering accommodation which is not subject to a planning condition restricting its use for the purpose of an ordinary dwelling) and that it is therefore recognised that there are self-catering accommodation businesses in Gwynedd which would merit consideration under such a policy;
2. That the authority continues to operate without an exemption policy, contrary to Welsh Government guidance; and
3. That the delay in introducing an exemption policy is attributable, it is said, to concern about creating loopholes and that implicit in that suggestion that continuing to raise a premium on property that merit being exempt is somehow better than the *possibility* that some might take advantage of an exclusion policy to avoid payment;

How does the Finance Department, in the absence of policy, deal with each case on its own merits (in line with Welsh Government guidance) strive to act fairly and consistently and with the due measure of proportionality lest the Authority have to face a legal challenge in this matter in due course?

Response – Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Huw Wyn Jones

Thank you very much for the question.

First, I think a misconception needs to be corrected. There is no guidance from the Welsh Government requiring the Council to have an exemption policy – what it does say is that there is encouragement to consider whether there is room for councils to use their discretionary powers to tailor a decision or to reduce council tax liability. The legislation itself sets out statutory exemptions, and no Council is required to have an additional exemption policy.

Having said that, discussions have started over the summer regarding whether it is necessary to create a Council Tax Premium exemptions policy for Cyngor Gwynedd, and under what circumstances exemptions would be appropriate. There are several complex and technical considerations to be discussed, and we also need to fully understand what the impact of any policy would be to ensure that we do not create any undesired outcomes.

The real unfairness here is that our young people are unable to get a roof over their heads in large parts of the County. It is not clear from the question which properties "deserve" an exemption, or on what grounds.

(8) Question by Councillor Beca Brown

It was International Day of Peace on September 21st – a day that gives the people of the world the opportunity to commit to creating a peaceful world and to reflect on how we could all contribute towards creating a culture of peace.

With that in mind, I note that drone testing and development has been taking place at Llanbedr airfield in Gwynedd for over a decade, for a variety of purposes. Given the horrific effects of drones on civilians in wars, and given that we live in a world that feels increasingly unstable, can we be certain that the drones being developed at Llanbedr are not being used for military purposes?

Response – Cabinet Member for Economy, Councillor Medwyn Hughes

Cyngor Gwynedd has been working with the leaseholders of the Snowdonia Aerospace Centre since the Site became part of the Snowdonia Enterprise Zone in 2011. The Centre offers a development space for different companies in the field of unmanned vehicles, satellites, and wider space technology. The Council has assisted them with projects that could lead to safeguarding and creating new employment opportunities in Llanbedr. They have recently received an £820,000 grant from the UK Space Agency to extend their research and testing facilities. Cyngor Gwynedd is not supporting any projects or activities on site at present.

The Council has contacted Snowdonia Aerospace LLP, the leaseholders of the Site, to obtain assurances that their customers are not developing drones for military purposes. Confirmation has been received from the Company that the site is only used by commercial companies, but as they have agreed to a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) with their customers, they are not in a position to provide details of the operations of these

companies. Nevertheless, the Company has confirmed that they have no planned military drone operations with the Ministry of Defence at the site in Llanbedr.