

# CYNGOR GWYNEDD



## A report to a meeting of Cyngor Gwynedd

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| <b>Date of meeting:</b> | 5 February 2026   |
| <b>Title of Item:</b>   | Our Bravery Brought Justice: Cyngor Gwynedd's Response Plan |
| <b>Cabinet Member:</b>  | Cllr Nia Jeffreys – Council Leader                          |
| <b>Contact Officer:</b> | Dafydd Gibbard, Chief Executive                             |

### THE DECISION SOUGHT

That the Council asks the Cabinet to consider the additional observations made at this meeting, as well as the observations of the Scrutiny Committees and the Governance and Audit Committee, when adopting the new Response Plan.

### BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

1. This report is presented in response to the Chair's request for an extraordinary meeting of the Council to ensure that all Members have an opportunity to discuss and scrutinise the Council's Response Plan to the 'Our Bravery Brought Justice' report, in accordance with paragraph 4.12.1 (b) of the Constitution.
2. The Response to Offending Plan was adopted by Cyngor Gwynedd's Cabinet in January 2025 and has been a live plan that has evolved over time since then. It was recognised that the Plan would need to be fully reviewed following the publication of the Child Practice Review report.
3. On 4 November 2025, 'Our Bravery Brought Justice' was published and the Response Plan has subsequently been amended. This is the biggest change to the Plan since its adoption.
4. The revamped Response Plan was submitted to the Response Board on 8 December, and observations and input were received prior to its submission to the Care Scrutiny Committee on 13 January 2026, the Governance and Audit Committee on 15 January and the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee on 19 January. In addition, a Ministerial Assurance Group has been established by the Education Minister, the Social Services Minister and the Local Government and Housing Minister and the Leader and relevant Cabinet Members attend and report on the progress of the Response Plan on a bi-monthly basis. The last meeting was held on 22 January.
5. The committees were asked to scrutinise the following stating that the recommendations of those committees would be conveyed to this extraordinary meeting of the Council.
  - a) That the Plan responds appropriately and fully to the 'Our Bravery Brought Justice' Report.
  - b) Consider the main priorities for immediate action.

- c) Advise on dealing with dependencies (e.g. waiting for regional or national recommendations) and mitigating potential risks.

6. Following this meeting the revised Response Plan will be submitted to Cabinet for formal adoption.

## **Context**

7. The original Response Plan was adopted by the Cabinet on 21 January 2025, with 4 key work streams:

- Work Stream A – Supporting victims and survivors
- Work Stream B – Ensuring we have the best possible safeguarding arrangements
- Work Stream C – Establishing, learning and improving
- Work Stream Ch – Supporting and stabilising Ysgol Friars

8. A Response Board was established to scrutinise, challenge and advise on the delivery of the Plan's content, independently chaired by Professor Sally Holland. Board Membership includes a number of external organisations as observers to challenge and monitor the progress of the Response Plan, including Estyn, Care Inspectorate Wales, Welsh Government, Children's Commissioner and the Regional Safeguarding Board. In addition, representation from Ysgol Friars (Headteacher and Chair of Governors), the Gwynedd Secondary sector, Council Officers, along with Cabinet Members from the relevant areas to set the strategic political direction of the areas of work under their responsibility whilst also scrutinising and supporting the work of officers.

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

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

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

11. An easy-to-read version of the Response Plan is currently being developed, and the aim is that it will be ready to be presented to Cabinet at the same time as the full Response Plan.
12. A detailed work programme is presented to the Response Board meetings and as this has now grown in size an overview report is also presented for each of the 7 individual themes, including an update on what has been achieved since the previous Board meeting and setting out what will be prioritised for the next period. See the theme progress reports in Appendix 2 for information.
13. Attached to the progress reports for the 7 themes, a detailed Work Programme is presented to Response Board Members to give them the opportunity to challenge the detail. This work programme includes recommendations and actions from the Our Bravery Brought Justice report, the original Response Plan and other additional actions that have been identified. A copy of the work programme is shared at Appendix 3 for information.
14. See in Appendix 3 that the high-level work tasks are listed (white lines) and there is a series of subtasks (yellow lines) for each work task which ensures the level of detail required at an operational level. This level of detail is presented to the Response Board to scrutinise as well as to give consideration to the theme reports.
15. Work tasks that have been completed and replaced or combined with the recommendations of Our Bravery Brought Justice have also been included in the Work Plan for completeness.
16. To ensure and track progress effectively, a set of clear performance measures are being applied across each of the seven themes of the Response Plan. These measures include quantitative indicators (such as receiving training, and compliance checks) and qualitative assessments (such as feedback from youth forums, parents and staff surveys, and the CIW and Estyn inspection). Regular monitoring against these measures will allow the Response Board to identify areas of success and those that need additional focus, ensuring that improvements are sustained and aligned with safeguarding priorities.
17. As the Our Bravery Brought Justice report has now been published, it is intended to share the Response Board's documents on the website from now on.

#### **Recommendations of the Care and Education and Economy Scrutiny Committees, and the Governance and Audit Committee**

18. A number of recommendations were made by the three Committees, and some modifications have already been made to the plan. The other suggestions will lead to the need for further adaptations and add to the work programme – that work is already underway and will be finalised following further consideration at this meeting. Adaptations that have already been made to the plan include the following:
  - Noting that the door will remain open for victims would wish to receive support in the future (part 1.4)
  - Reference to pupils' well-being in the objectives of Work Stream 7
  - Reference to Estyn inspection in 2023 has been deleted
  - Add to part 2.4 which refers to the investigation into the events of 2019

- Rephrase references to 'grooming training' to 'training to recognise signs of grooming'

19. The recommendations of the Scrutiny Committees and the Governance and Audit Committee which will be fully considered by Cabinet are shared below.

20. The decisions of the Care Scrutiny Committee held on 13 January 2026:

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| <p>1) <i>To note the work programme</i></p> <p>2) <i>To request a progress report in 6 months on the work programme including information on the whistleblowing policy and its implementation</i></p> <p>3) <i>To request a report on securing a Child Friendly County status and becoming a Trauma-Informed Council</i></p> <p>4) <i>To ask Cabinet to consider</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>adding an external female contact name to the poster to share information about concerns and ensure contact details are available on school websites and the Council website</i></li> <li>• <i>addressing the voice of the family as well as the voice of the child in work stream 1</i></li> <li>• <i>amending the text under the heading '2.3 – Estyn inspection of the Council's Education Department' on page 18 of the Response Plan to include a sentence reflecting the context that, despite the commendation by Estyn, a school head was arrested a few months later</i></li> <li>• <i>ensuring that grooming training is available to all who need it</i></li> <li>• <i>providing external specialist safeguarding training for members and governors</i></li> <li>• <i>adding the "well-being of children and young people" to the description of work stream 7 - Supporting and Stabilising Ysgol Friars</i></li> <li>• <i>corresponding with Welsh Government to express concern about the challenges and risks surrounding the role of school governors</i></li> </ul> |
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21. The decisions of the Governance and Audit Committee held on 15 January 2026:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>To accept the detail of the Response Plan</i></li> <li>• <i>To thank the Officers for their work and welcome that the Response Plan is being discussed in several forums</i></li> <li>• <i>That a simple and definite summary/front page of the main action points is needed</i></li> <li>• <i>That the Committee receives regular updates on the actions that have been taken or are being considered as a suitable and appropriate response to the situation</i></li> <li>• <i>A request by the Committee for Estyn to acknowledge the weaknesses of their report on the Council's safeguarding arrangements, June 2023</i></li> <li>• <i>That Whistleblowing Arrangements and Safeguarding Arrangements need to be among the best - reviews to these policies are welcome - need an update on the work, timetable and manner in which they are adopted</i></li> </ul> |
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*Note: Request to review the last paragraph of 2.5 of the Response Plan: 'Investigation into the events of 2019 that has been the subject of press coverage' – more context is needed about the independent investigation that was completed and what the reason was for the decision not to share the report/findings. Request to set out the context for Estyn's commendation of the Council's safeguarding arrangements (June 2023). The wording as it is, is inappropriate given the failures that later emerged.*

22. The decision of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee held on 19 January 2026:

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: 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;*
- *Relevant information should be 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 in Part 5, Wales Safeguarding Procedures, 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;*

- *There needs to be 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 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 pathways of escalation, 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: Reasonable Force

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

#### Work Stream 6: Crisis Planning and Crisis Response

- *Crisis planning and response should be treated as a live process that is part of the safeguarding process and should be tested regularly;*
- *Clarity is 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 required to:*
- *include information about their safeguarding arrangements prominently on their websites;*
- *consider adapting the content of their relationships education curriculum to reflect what happened at Ysgol Friars.*

#### General

- *There is a need to ensure that there is an overview of the work streams in their entirety;*
- *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.*

23. The Cabinet will consider all these recommendations along with the further observations of this meeting before adopting the new plan.

### **Further Considerations**

#### **Consultation**

24. Extensive consultation was carried out in the development of the Response Plan in order to receive input from several directions including

- Chair of the child practice review
- Children's Commissioner
- Estyn
- Care Inspectorate Wales
- RASASC
- Welsh Government
- Cabinet Members
- Cyngor Gwynedd Officers

#### **The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**

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

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

26. Representatives of service users have been consulted such as representatives of the schools sector in Gwynedd.

27. In addition, at the request of the Leader at the Cabinet meeting on 11 November 2025, the Independent Chair of the Response Board is currently considering the most appropriate approach to include the voice of victims in the work.

*Have you considered working together?*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **Impact on Equality Characteristics, the Welsh Language and the Socio-Economic Duty**

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

#### **Next Steps**

33. The revamped Response Plan will be submitted to Cabinet for consideration for formal adoption on 10 March 2026.
34. The progress of the work streams within the Response Plan will continue to be monitored by the Response Board every other month until all the response plan actions are embedded or addressed within the Authority's performance challenge regime and the Board members are satisfied that evidence in relation to the impact measures listed demonstrates the effectiveness of these actions.

35. Cabinet will continue to receive a quarterly progress report from the Independent Chair of the Response Board, Professor Sally Holland
36. There is a request by the Care Scrutiny Committee, the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee, and the Governance and Audit Committee to scrutinise the progress every 6 months.

## **ANY CONSULTATIONS UNDERTAKEN PRIOR TO RECOMMENDING THE DECISION**

### **Chief Finance Officer**

“Many of the actions shown in the Response Plan will be delivered by services within their budgets. On the other hand, other steps will require additional resources, whether permanently or on a one-off basis. These costs have been considered when drawing up the 2026/27 budget which goes before the Council on 5 March, or when considering one-off funding to be financed from reserves. In this context, I am satisfied that financial considerations will not be an obstacle to the delivery of the action plan.”

### **Monitoring Officer**

“This report has been prepared in response to the Chair’s request to call an extraordinary meeting of the Council following a request from the Care Scrutiny Committee. I note the wish to give an opportunity for Members who are not members of the Care Scrutiny Committee, Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee or the Governance and Audit Committee to provide observations on the Response Plan. The Response Plan is an executive matter which is the responsibility of the Cabinet to adopt and implement. The role of the Scrutiny Committees will be to maintain an overview of progress in delivering this key plan as it progresses. However, the request for this meeting provides a specific opportunity for the other members to give their views on the Plan before it is presented to the Cabinet for consideration and a decision on its adoption”

### **Appendices:**

**Appendix 1 – Our Bravery Brought Justice: Cyngor Gwynedd’s Response Plan**

**Appendix 2 – Overview Reports**

**Appendix 3 – Response Plan Work Programme**

**Appendix 4 – Our Bravery Brought Justice**