

CYNGOR GWYNEDD – Report to Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet

Title of item:	<i>Commissioning Investigations</i>
Cabinet Member:	<i>Cllr Nia Jeffreys – Council Leader</i>
Relevant officer:	<i>Dafydd Gibbard – Chief Executive</i>
Date of meeting:	19 May 2026

1. The Decision Sought

The Cabinet is asked:

- a) To commission the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Council Leader, and where relevant, the Monitoring Officer, to proceed with the further investigations and reviews noted in part 4 of this report following the publication of the Our Bravery Brought Justice report, including:
 - (a) Agreement on the terms of reference and operational steps,
 - (b) Identify and appoint an external independent investigator, where required
 - (c) Make arrangements to receive final reports and take steps to present them to the relevant committees and forums
- b) To authorise the Chief Executive to continue to communicate with other relevant bodies and partners regarding the steps and investigations that they are undertaking and the lessons learnt that could benefit the Council.
- c) To authorise the Chief Executive to divert staff resources to support independent investigators to complete the work.
- ch) To authorise the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Head of Finance and Cabinet Member for Finance, to prioritise and approve allocations from the fund established by means of the 2026-27 One-off Bids procedure to fund the investigations.

2. The reason why the Cabinet must make the decision:

- 2.1 Following the publication of the Our Bravery Brought Justice report, the Council Cabinet adopted its second formal Response Plan which referenced several objectives when proceeding to ensure that our response to all recommendations deriving from the Child Practice Review is comprehensive and thorough and that we strengthen our safeguarding systems as much as possible. At the Full Council meeting in December, it was resolved to support a request to Cabinet to consider

what further investigations are needed to address what extends beyond the boundaries of the Review.

3. Introduction and Rationale

Background / Introduction

- 3.1 In January 2025, the Council's Response Plan to the crimes of the former headteacher of Ysgol Friars was adopted, and subsequently, a Response Board was established to monitor the progress of this plan. The Board is independently chaired by Professor Sally Holland and several representatives from statutory organisations are observers on the Board, including the Welsh Government, the Children's Commissioner, Estyn, Care Inspectorate Wales and the Regional Safeguarding Board.
- 3.2 The Our Bravery Brought Justice report was published in November 2025 and subsequently, the Response Plan and associated work programme were reviewed to ensure that they responded to all recommendations therein.
- 3.3 At the Full Council meeting on 4 December 2025, the Cabinet was called upon to conduct several further investigations following the publication of the Our Bravery Brought Justice report.
- 3.4 At the same meeting, the Leader expressed her intention to commission a review of governance arrangements, as a result of the report's publication.
- 3.5 The new Response Plan was submitted to the Care Scrutiny Committee, the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee, the Governance and Audit Committee and the Full Council early in 2026, before the Cabinet adopted it formally on 10 March 2026.
- 3.6 The Council is fully committed to do everything it possibly can to improve safeguarding arrangements and several actions within the Response Plan have already been implemented. This progress is reported to the Cabinet every quarter by the Independent Chair of the Response Board.
- 3.7 All Response Board papers, as well as useful information about our progress, can be seen on the Council's website. [Response Plan Programme Board](#)

The rationale and justification for recommending the decision

- 3.8 Following the criminal case, several investigations have been conducted or are in progress. This paper is submitted in order to formally commission further investigations to support the learning and strengthen our in-house arrangements.
- 3.9 A Child Practice Review is a routine step in all cases where a child has suffered significant abuse or neglect, in order to learn lessons and for the future improvement of practice, safeguarding arrangements and systems. This statutory

review was undertaken by the North Wales Safeguarding Board and was chaired by Jan Pickles.

3.10 The Review went much further than is customary in such reviews, and after duly considering all circumstances in the case, a decision was made to look at everything for the period spanning January 2017 to September 2023.

3.11 Within the terms of reference, there were no limitations on what the investigators could have considered, and the work progressed from June 2024 until the report's publication in November 2025.

3.12 In order to determine what investigations should be undertaken, the objectives of the Response Plan were considered first.

3.13 It is noted that several work streams and investigations are already in progress or have completed, including elements of the Response Plan, such as:

- the police's criminal investigation,
- the statutory Child Practice Review
- investigation into events in 2019,
- Independent Investigation to the recommendations of the Independent Complaints Panel,
- Independent investigation of the Information Commissioner's Office into the Council's arrangements for dealing with applications under the Freedom of Information Act
- Scrutiny Investigation into Safeguarding Arrangements in Schools
- Joint Review by Estyn and Care Inspectorate Wales,
- Audit of Part 5 referrals.

3.14 Building upon an extending these investigations and others in order to learn lessons from further investigations commissioned as a result of this report.

3.15 When weighing up what additional investigations would be appropriate, careful consideration was given to the work and evidence already gathered, in order to avoid duplication, and to ensure that the process is carried out in a sensitive manner that reduces the risk of re-traumatising the victims.

4. Further investigations to be commissioned:

4.1 Before coming to a final decision on the type of further investigations that should be commissioned, consideration was given to observations and suggestions from Elected Members during various recent committees, as well as informal observations from individuals from external bodies and organisations.

- 4.2 As the Cabinet will commission these investigations, there will be a need to report back to a range of various forums, e.g., the Governance and Audit Committee, to the Scrutiny Committee or to the Safeguarding Strategic Panel - those paths will depend on the nature of the work and the investigation in question.
- 4.3 Following careful consideration, it is recommended that the following further investigations should be held:

Governance review

- 4.4 In accordance with the statement of the Council Leader at the Council meeting on 4 December 2025, the Cabinet will commission a review into the Council's governance arrangements in relation to the missed opportunities and recommendations in the Our Bravery Brought Justice report and establish whether there are lessons to be learnt.
- 4.5 This review will be carried out by an external independent investigator, and it will consider the opportunities lost, and whether the arrangements for reporting into the Council's democratic processes applied and had been followed. It will also consider whether concerns or information were escalated through the proper channels at the time, and whether there is a need to review the strength and adequacy of corporate arrangements in light of the report's findings.
- 4.6 This review will be completed by an external investigator and will be submitted to the Governance and Audit Committee in the Autumn term 2026.

Culture

- 4.7 The Chief Executive has already expressed his intention to carry out a review of the Council's work culture, as well as the Ffordd Gwynedd Plan, and this review will report to the Cabinet along the journey. It will also seek input from all Elected Members as well as Council staff.
- 4.8 The review will draw together matters relating to work culture by means of several sources. This includes:
- the staff voice survey,
 - direct feedback from self-assessment and performance processes
 - concerns raised by staff through the whistleblowing pathway
 - regular engagement through the managers' network
 - staff sessions
 - human resources processes

- drawing on the findings of reviews conducted by external organisations including Audit Wales, Estyn, Care Inspectorate Wales, and the Independent Panel Performance Assessment.

There is an opportunity to build on all this via the review of our work culture and the Ffordd Gwynedd Plan.

- 4.9 This review will be led by the Chief Executive, with input from Elected Members, staff and other stakeholders. As local elections will be held in May 2027, this will affect the work programme in achieving this work. The intention is to programme this work in two parts, ensuring that the review itself has been completed by the end of 2026, and to hold further sessions with the Members who will be new to the Council in May 2027. The findings of the review are intended to be submitted to the Scrutiny Committee in the Autumn, before asking the Cabinet to adopt this by the end of the year.

Efficiency of the School Governance Procedure

- 4.10 Our Bravery Brought Justice highlighted that the division of statutory responsibilities are not always clear and that there is some confusion in the understanding of different stakeholders in terms of where various responsibilities lie in some areas.
- 4.11 The current procedure where Governing Bodies are responsible for school management and governance matters, and then the expectation for the Education Authority to support, can be vague at times, and mutually frustrating.
- 4.12 Welsh Government is conducting a review of school governance arrangements, and the outcomes of this review are expected soon. We have welcomed this review and have made an offer to Welsh Government that Cyngor Gwynedd participates in the work, as we have already made publicly clear that the current system is "broken" and that we are therefore eager to see changes. In addition, we have made recommendations to the Government regarding their initial terms of reference, emphasising the need for broader representation from schools and contexts (including smaller schools), and we have continued to communicate this in a mutual way.
- 4.13 Whilst we await the outcome of the national review, we will also conduct our own review. This review will look at:
- the current school governance system and how it is implemented in Gwynedd, with a focus on the inter-relationship between the school and the Education Department
 - the effectiveness of the current system and identifying any practical barriers it creates for schools and the Education Department

- 4.14 Once the national review has reached its conclusions, we will be able to establish whether any adjustments to the system will help overcome any issues identified in our own in-house review.
- 4.15 The detailed brief for this work is established in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education, and we will commission an external adviser to carry out this work, aiming to submit the findings to the Scrutiny Committee by the end of 2026.

Systemic understanding in terms of implementing Part 5

- 4.16 Since the publication of Our Bravery Brought Justice (and prior to that), changes have been made to our arrangements for dealing with Part 5 referrals, which are referrals regarding persons in positions of trust, in line with the report's recommendations.
- 4.17 As the need to strengthen our arrangements has been highlighted, we will conduct a Review of all duplicate Part 5 reviews, backdated to 2020, and we will then look further than that in the case of individuals where any duplicate referrals emerge. The vast majority of this work has already been completed, and it will report to the Safeguarding Strategic Panel in October 2026.

Establishing facts and learning safeguarding lessons in any school under the leadership of the offender.

- 4.18 The scope of the above-mentioned Part 5 review will be extended further for any school where the offender was its leader, and the work will look at whether there was a pattern of referrals regarding any of the schools in question, or whether significant safeguarding matters had been escalated whilst the offender was in charge of the school.
- 4.19 We will go as far back as our records and information allows us to go. Our Bravery Brought Justice has already considered the context of this to a degree, by setting its start date as January 2017.
- 4.20 This review will be carried out by an external adviser and it will report to the Safeguarding Strategic Panel in the Autumn 2026.

Engagement with other bodies.

- 4.21 Although Cyngor Gwynedd has no powers to investigate the roles of others in all of this, we have a clear commitment to encourage others to conduct investigations and respond to the recommendations of Our Bravery Brought Justice that are relevant to other organisations.
- 4.22 With this in mind, we have already communicated with several other organisations that could be relevant, in order to learn about their response steps. We will continue with this communication in order to ascertain whether they have any

further information that would aid us as a Council, as well as safeguarding arrangements in general.

Investigations beyond the powers of the Local Authority

4.23 It is acknowledged that there are clear limitations on the Council's scope and powers regarding some elements arising from the Our Bravery Brought Justice report. The Council does not have the authority or statutory powers to investigate every relevant body, process or decision that may have influenced the situation over the period in question; neither does it have the powers to force those whom it does not employ to participate in any further investigations.

4.24 With this in mind, although the Council is putting firm actions in place through the Response Plan and is commissioning further investigations that are within its powers by means of this report, it is emphasises that those steps, in isolation, cannot answer every question that may be relevant. A Public Enquiry would be the direction to take for investigating anything beyond the powers held by this Council and the Cabinet has already called for that.

5. Next Steps

5.1 Following Cabinet approval, the intention is to proceed immediately to commission the investigations that are yet to commence and appoint external investigators to assist us to complete them all.

6. Views of the Statutory Officers.

6.1 Chief Finance Officer

It will be possible for one element of the work to be carried out within departmental budgets, while additional resources on a permanent and one-off basis will be required for the other element of the work. Additional funding to cover the extra permanent costs has been considered in preparing the 2026/27 budget submitted to the Council on 5 March 2026, and one-off bids for extra money to deal with one-off costs have been approved by Cabinet on 10 March 2026. As I have previously reported to Cabinet and full Council, I am satisfied that financial considerations will not be a barrier to implementing the Our Bravery Brought Justice response plan.

6.2 Monitoring Officer

The proposals for further reviews following from the Our Bravery Brought Justice report highlights an opportunity to consider the wider context from a governance and risk perspective. Gaining this understanding will contribute to a response which will identify lessons and strengthen the Councils systems generally. Obviously, having regard to the context if matters come to light during this work which is subject to other investigatory/referral processes then this will take priority. I would also note that these processes will be

undertaken having regard to the requirements of data protection legislation and rights and responsibilities to undertake fair and appropriate processes.