

MEETING	The Council
DATE	2 July 2026
TITLE	SOCIAL SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT 2025/26
PURPOSE	To submit the report for the attention of Council Members
AUTHOR	Dylan Owen, Statutory Director of Social Services

1. Background

- 1.1. At the end of every fiscal year, all Statutory Directors of Social Services are required to provide and publish a report regarding the performance of Social Services within the local authority during the previous year.
- 1.2. The purpose of the annual report is to note the local authority's journey towards improvement in providing services to residents, to those who receive information, advice and assistance, the individuals and the carers who receive care and support.
- 1.3. Under the requirements of the Social Services and Well-being Act, I as Director am asked to consider the range of information and experiences that affect the ability of the Council's Social Services to provide reliable, sustainable services of the highest quality, and to express my opinion in the report and present it to the Council. The report draws attention to any lessons learnt and outlines the priorities for the year to come. It also explains how we assessed people's needs and included them at the centre as we shaped our services and care provision.
- 1.4. The format follows national guidelines and a template, and we assess our performance according to four main headings: **People**, **Prevention**, **Partnership** and **Well-being**.
- 1.5. As noted in the foreword to this report, this has been one of the most challenging years in the 30-year history of Cyngor Gwynedd. Social Services, and particularly the Children and Family Support Department, faced a period of significant change and challenge following the findings of the Child Practice Review, *Our Bravery Brought Justice*, which highlighted serious weaknesses in safeguarding arrangements. As a result, there has been a clear focus on learning, rebuilding trust, and ensuring that the necessary improvements are delivered.
- 1.6. The year has therefore seen a significant focus on responding to the recommendations of *Our Bravery Brought Justice*. Work has progressed to strengthen arrangements that ensure children's voices are at the heart of decision-making, to develop and strengthen the quality assurance framework, and to raise the profile of safeguarding across the Council. The independent scrutiny provided through the Response Plan Programme Board has been an important element of the improvement work, and the constructive challenge and

support provided have been welcomed in helping the Council ensure that lessons learned are translated into practical and sustainable change.

- 1.7. While this work has understandably taken priority and occupied a significant proportion of the Director's time during the year, it is also important to recognise the progress and achievements delivered across a wide range of services. The Learning Disability Service has continued to expand employment opportunities for individuals, increasing the number of people on a pathway towards fairly paid employment. Successful collaboration with Mantell Gwynedd and other partners has strengthened community support, while the innovative work of the Autism Team and the continued growth of Active Dementia Gwynedd demonstrate the value of investing in creative and preventative approaches that improve people's lives.
- 1.8. The year has also seen increasing use of technology and innovation to support people and improve the way services are delivered. From telecare, the robotic cat and the *Helpu'n Hun* self-assessment tool to the use of artificial intelligence through Beam Notes and developments such as the Niwro App, technology is providing new ways of promoting independence and improving efficiency. Virtual reality headsets have been used to support staff training, while new approaches to communication and awareness-raising through the *Gwynedd yn Gwenu* Tik-Toks account are helping us reach new audiences and share positive stories about care and wellbeing.
- 1.9. The greatest strength of our services, however, remains our workforce. The stories and quotations throughout this report demonstrate the direct impact of their work on people's lives. During the Director's visits to teams across the county, the same message has emerged time and again: this is a challenging period, with heavy workloads, recruitment difficulties and increasingly complex needs. Despite this, the commitment, compassion and professionalism of the workforce remain evident. From those who have dedicated decades to the sector to those just beginning their careers through the Academi Gofal, the same pride and determination to make a difference in people's lives can be seen. Sincere thanks are extended to them for their invaluable contribution.
- 1.10. This report seeks to present a balanced picture. Alongside the successes, we have sought to be open about the areas where more needs to be done. As a result, each section includes "**How can we do things better?**" boxes highlighting the key areas for improvement and further development.
- 1.11. These include developing more local provision for children through the small homes programme and not-for-profit fostering, expanding the use of direct payments, strengthening support for unpaid carers, and improving collaboration within the Council and with external partners. The *Llechen Lan* research has also highlighted the need to strengthen strategic planning and develop more sustainable services for the future. These areas will remain key priorities over the coming year.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. The Council is requested to note the content of the report submitted by the authority's Statutory Director for Social Services.

3. Views of the Statutory Officers

The Monitoring Officer:

Presenting the report to the full Council provides an opportunity to consider the work and challenges which faces "Social Services" from the perspective of the statutory director. I am satisfied with the propriety of the report.

Head of Finance Department:

I believe that the financial information contained in the annual report is a fair reflection of the situation of the Social Services for 2025/26. I am satisfied that the approval of this annual report will not involve any additional financial commitment from the Council.