

QUARTERLY REPORT TO CABINET: RESPONSE PLAN PROGRAMME BOARD

PROFESSOR SALLY HOLLAND: CHAIR OF THE RESPONSE BOARD

DATE: 7th July 2026

Introduction

Since my last report to Cabinet in March 2026, the Response Plan Programme Board has continued to oversee the Council's response to the recommendations arising from the Child Practice Review, *Our Bravery Brought Justice*, and the wider Response Plan.

This report summarises the key developments and progress made during the last quarter.

Current Position

Work continues across all areas of the Response Plan against the seven key themes:

1. Voice of the Child and Supporting Victims
2. Managing Allegations and Concerns About Adults Working with Children
3. Training and Policies
4. School Governance
5. Restrictive Practices
6. Crisis Planning and Crisis Response
7. Supporting Ysgol Friars

Detailed progress reports are presented to the Board by the theme leads, highlighting achievements, priorities, risks and challenges, dependencies and resource implications. Board members have welcomed the improved reporting arrangements, noting that they provide greater clarity regarding progress, measures and outcomes.

This quarter's developments have included:

Estyn Inspection of Ysgol Friars

The recent Estyn inspection outcome for Ysgol Friars, has been shared with the Board. It was encouraging to note the recognition of the progress made since the appointment of Headteacher Margaret Davies in April 2025. Whilst the report identified areas requiring further attention, improvements were noted in safeguarding arrangements, leadership and school governance. This report provides an important external view to supplement the internal reports about the school's progress that the Board has previously received.

Voice of the Child

The Voice of the Child Strategy has been developed and updated following feedback from Board members. Supporting appendices are currently being finalised, with engagement planned with the Children and Young People's Forum, Education Strategic Groups and the Gwynedd Governors Forum following the GCSE examination period.

I have sought assurance that the voices of children and young people are being captured from a sufficiently broad range of groups and experiences. In particular, I was keen to understand how the Council engages with young carers, disabled children, care-experienced children, homeless young people and other groups whose voices may not always be routinely heard. I was encouraged to learn that Cyngor Gwynedd is recruiting a dedicated Engagement and Participation Officer to help strengthen this work.

This work marks an important step in Gwynedd's ambition to become a Child-friendly County, following a framework set out by UNICEF. This proactive and longer-term approach marks a transition from responding to immediate gaps, following the Our Bravery Brought Justice process, towards a long-term, preventative approach.

Safeguarding Awareness and Training

Further work has been undertaken to strengthen safeguarding awareness across the workforce. A new safeguarding awareness video has been developed to improve accessibility, particularly for staff who do not routinely access Council systems. Whilst the Board welcome these developments, the focus must now be on impact. It is important that these initiatives lead not only to improved completion rates but also to a greater understanding of safeguarding responsibilities and how concerns should be recognised and reported in practice. Additionally, staff must feel confident that their concerns will be taken seriously.

Crisis Planning

Progress continues on the development of crisis planning arrangements for schools. I have been encouraged by the engagement with headteachers throughout this process, who have provided appropriate challenge and constructive suggestions for improvements. This has helped to ensure that arrangements are informed by operational experience and are practical for schools to implement. As this work progresses, it will be important to ensure that plans are well understood, tested and embedded.

Public Accountability and Transparency

I welcome the development of a public-facing website, a child and family-friendly summary document, and supporting infographics outlining both the progress made to date and the

areas where further work remains ongoing. These resources should help improve transparency and understanding amongst residents, stakeholders and survivors.

I am also pleased that the Board's Terms of Reference have been revised and that Board papers are now published following each meeting. This is an important step in strengthening openness and public accountability.

Prioritisation of Activity

The Board has reviewed a revised prioritisation framework for the Response Plan. Given the scale of activity underway, the introduction of a clearer approach to prioritisation is welcomed. Whilst all actions remain important, the framework should help ensure that attention, capacity and resources remain focused on those areas presenting the greatest risk and requiring the most urgent action.

In March, a budget of approximately £600k was approved to support the workstreams under the Programme Board. I welcome this allocation, which provides a clear resource commitment to support delivery and help progress the programme at pace. The focus now will be on ensuring that the funding is used effectively to support the priorities across all work areas.

Scrutiny and Assurance

Outcome Measures

Work continues to develop and refine impact measures. The Board has reiterated the importance of focusing on meaningful indicators of progress, including qualitative feedback from children and young people. While a significant amount of work has been undertaken to develop policies, frameworks and procedures, the Board continues to emphasise the need to move beyond a compliance approach. The adoption of policy should be seen as the starting point rather than the end point. The key priority now is to understand the real impact of these changes on workforce practice, organisational culture and, most importantly, the safety and wellbeing of children. Some outcome measures are beginning to be presented to the Board, and the Board members are keen to see more of these in the coming months.

Quality Assurance Framework

The Quality Assurance Framework for children's services has been completed and presented to the Board. I am encouraged to see this important piece of work now in place. It sets out the vision, values and expectations for quality assurance activity across the service, including responsibilities, learning arrangements, supervision requirements and mechanisms for continuous improvement.

The focus now needs to shift to ensuring it is effectively communicated across the workforce and embedded in day-to-day practice, so that the intended improvements are realised in practice rather than remaining at a procedural level.

Welsh Government Assurance Group

As previously noted, the Welsh Government has established a separate Ministerial Assurance Board following the publication of *Our Bravery Brought Justice*. Following the Senedd election, there is currently some uncertainty regarding timelines and future engagement, as new Ministers establish their priorities and working arrangements. At this stage, the longer-term position of this group remains unclear, although further clarity is expected to emerge as the new administration becomes established.

Welsh Government representatives in the Board have provided updates on the ongoing national reviews of safeguarding governance and of school governing bodies. The findings of these are expected to have implications for all local authorities and regional safeguarding boards.

Next Steps

As the Board moves into the next quarter, it will:

- Continue to review and advise on the implementation of the Response Plan and relevant priorities arising from the CPR.
- Continue work on impact measurement, ensuring this is developed in a proportionate and sustainable way.
- Keep under review the Board's ongoing role and lifespan as a separate entity, including how this aligns with wider Council governance and scrutiny arrangements. This was discussed with the Welsh Government Ministerial Assurance Board prior to the election. Future arrangements will now need to be considered with the new Government.

Closing Remarks

In closing, I would like to acknowledge the commitment shown by Board members during what has been a period of continued development and growing maturity in the Board's arrangements. There has been significant work to strengthen reporting, and I would also commend the contribution of theme leads for their ongoing work in developing and delivering the programme areas. External members and elected members have continued to provide constructive scrutiny, challenge and supportive advice throughout.

As the Board moves into its next phase, there will need to be a stronger focus on measuring impact and ensuring that changes are properly embedded in practice. As part of this, it will also be important to continue to consider the Board's longer-term role, ensuring arrangements remain proportionate and aligned with wider governance structures. In addition, the implications of the recent Senedd election will need to be kept under review as future governance and oversight arrangements develop under the new administration.

As a final remark, I wish to acknowledge the recent reporting of child abuse at Canolfan Brynffynnon up to its closure in 2014, together with the prolonged employment issues which followed. The Response Board does not have a role to investigate past events, but instead to focus on current and future safeguarding. Nonetheless, I acknowledge the continued impact of serious past safeguarding failings on the confidence of Gwynedd's children, parents, staff and wider population regarding the Cyngor's ability to safeguard children in education. This makes it even more necessary for the Cyngor to take clear and transparent steps to regain that confidence and to demonstrate not only policy changes but also changes in everyday practice and culture.

Professor Sally Holland

Chair of the Response Plan Programme Board