

NAME OF COMMITTEE	Governance and Audit Committee
DATE OF MEETING	22 October 2026
TITLE OF ITEM	Recommendations arising from the Panel Performance Assessment - Council's Draft Response
OBJECTIVE	Submit the Recommendations of the Panel Performance Assessment and a draft response Action Plan for the committee's consideration.
RECOMMENDATION	• Consider the content of the Panel Performance Assessment report. • Review the Council's draft response to the Panel Assessment recommendations, considering whether any changes to that response should be recommended. • Support the intention to welcome and accept the Assessment's recommendations in full and to implement them as soon as possible • Present an update to the Committee within 12 months on progress in implementing the recommendations.
CABINET MEMBER	Councillor Nia Jeffreys, Leader of the Council
AUTHOR	Dafydd Gibbard, Chief Executive

1. Background

- 1.1. The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 sets a duty on councils to conduct a Panel Performance Assessment at least **once** within an electoral cycle.
- 1.2. This duty is linked to the duty of conducting annual performance self-assessments. Similarly, the panel assessment will look specifically at the extent to which the Council:
 - exercises its functions effectively;
 - is using its resources prudently, efficiently and effectively; and
 - has robust governance arrangements in place for ensuring the above.
- 1.3. The Panel Performance Assessment is not an audit or inspection. Its conclusions should be read alongside the Council's self-assessment, internal audit work, and external and regulatory audits. The report, however, provides a valuable independent challenge and notes the development areas that will strengthen the Council's ability to deliver its priorities in a sustainable manner.
- 1.4. The Council commissioned the Welsh Local Government Association to carry out the assessment. The Panel included 4 persons, including an independent Chair; a peer from the broader public, private or voluntary sector; a serving senior local government officer (CE or Director level), and a senior elected member (from outside the Council). A list of members for the Panel in Gwynedd can be seen below:
 - Emlyn Dole – Chair (Former Leader of Carmarthenshire Council)

- Cllr Gwyneth Ellis - Elected Member (Denbighshire Council)
- Rob Thomas - Senior Officer (Chief Executive of the Vale of Glamorgan Council)
- Sian Elin Flint Freel – a peer from the broader, public, private or voluntary sector

- 1.5. An assessment was carried out based on a scoping document prepared by the Council, using the methodology of the Panel Performance Assessment (PPA) of the Welsh Local Government Association. The scoping document provided background information about Gwynedd and the Council to Panel members before the Performance Assessment was carried out. In addition, the Council's latest self-assessment outcomes were used, as well as external regulator assessments to steer the work. The Panel also received a range of other supplementary information, including corporate policies and performance information in advance.
- 1.6. Before carrying out the Performance Assessment, the Council also noted the following questions where insights and feedback from external peers would be valuable to the Council as a part of the assessment process:
 - **Governance and Leadership:** To what extent do political leaders and senior officers set clear instruction and encourage change, and are the governance structures and decision-making processes robust enough to secure better long-term outcomes for residents?
 - **Strategic Planning, Resources and Capacity:** Do we have the capacity and ability to deliver on our strategic priorities, and are the available resources effectively aligned with those priorities?
 - **Monitoring, Measuring and Evaluating Performance:** Do we have suitable arrangements in place to monitor and assess the performance of the services provided to customers and residents, to ensure continuous improvement?
- 1.7. The work was carried out on the site over four days, ending on 13 March 2026. The work included reviewing documents, data and external reports, as well as meetings and focus groups with elected members, officers, staff, trade unions, partners, businesses, residents and town and community council representatives.
- 1.8. See **Appendix 1** for the week's programme, which demonstrates the breadth of the work and the wide range of opportunities the Panel had to challenge and observe during its time here.

2. Main findings

- 2.1. The Panel concluded that Cyngor Gwynedd discharges its performance duties under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.
- 2.2. It was noted that there are robust governance arrangements in place, constructive relationships between members and officers, and a clear commitment to continuous improvement. A strong sense of pride was also expressed in the County, a commitment to its cultural and social identity, and the Council's reputation as a reliable and cooperative regional partner.

- 2.3. At the same time, financial pressures and workforce challenges mean that there is a need to speed up the organisational transformation and strengthen leadership capacity, financial sustainability and workforce planning. The Council should also better merge its performance management and risk arrangements, ensuring a clear link to the Corporate Plan and continue to support transparent decisions, firm scrutiny and constructive challenge.
- 2.4. A final copy of the Panel Performance Assessment Report was received in June 2026, and it includes 7 recommendations for the Council. A full copy of the Panel Performance Assessment Report can be seen in **Appendix 2**.

3. Relevant considerations

- 3.1. In accordance with Section 93 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, the Council is required to prepare a response to the Panel Performance Assessment report, noting:

A. To what degree the council accepts the findings of the report regarding the extent to which it meets the performance requirements;

- It's recommended that we welcome and accept the findings and recommendations of the Panel Performance Assessment. A number of the recommendations relate to matters that had already been identified by the Governance Group, some of which are already being progressed.
- It was extremely valuable to have a Panel of experienced individuals here for a week, and their work was thorough and inclusive. The work of Members and Officers was observed and challenged, and a substantial volume of relevant documentation was considered. It was particularly valuable to receive independent views from individuals who have contributed and worked in leadership roles in Local Government across the country.
- The report's conclusions are positive and provide assurance that the Council is operating appropriately in fulfilling its duties. This is clearly to be welcomed, but the report also makes recommendations which, if adopted, would provide us with an opportunity to aim even higher and deliver better outcomes for the residents of Gwynedd.

B. To what degree the Council intends to implement any recommendations in the report; and

C. any steps that the Council intends to take to increase the degree to which it meets the performance requirements.

The recommendations of the Panel are as follows:

Recommendation	Details of the Recommendation
Recommendation 1a <i>Strategic Planning</i>	Cyngor Gwynedd should build on the current theme-based approach when preparing and developing the next Corporate Plan, with a focus on: • Long-term planning • Setting a vision for Gwynedd and the values that are essential to achieve it • Ensuring an approach that focuses on the key strategic priorities for the Council and Gwynedd as a place • Including staff, members and the wider community to develop and achieve a place-based Corporate Plan • Fully aligning with the Council's Medium-term Financial Plan and Transformation Strategy
Recommendation 1b <i>Strategic Planning</i>	Cyngor Gwynedd should review the capacity of its strategic leadership at an operational level to enable it to achieve its key priorities and plan for the long-term.
Recommendation 2a <i>Transformation</i>	Ensure that the workforce is at the core of strategic planning and transformational work in the future, bringing together the different areas of practice that already exist within the Council, in order to ensure a whole-Council approach to internal inclusion and engagement.
Recommendation 2b <i>Transformation</i>	Cyngor Gwynedd should develop a united transformational approach which clearly sets-out the organisation's general direction and priorities for change. This approach should: • Operate on a whole-organisation strategic level • Continue to realise and utilise the value of partners • Be integrated with the Medium-term Financial Plan, and be funded through this • Provide a firm foundation for securing the organisation's long-term financial resilience
Recommendation 3 <i>Resources and Working in Partnership</i>	In order to build capacity and strengthen collaboration with partners: • Bring the adopted economic strategy live on all levels across Gwynedd • Realise the potential for working in partnership with town and community councils • Increase the council's ability to achieve its economic/social ambitions • Ensure that the Mantell Gwynedd Agreement is implemented and monitored in full
Recommendation 4 <i>Risk</i>	Cyngor Gwynedd needs to develop and agree on a corporate risk strategy, which expresses the Council's risk appetite and: • Ensures an up-to-date corporate risk register and strategy • Defines the role of the leadership team, the governance and audit committee, the Cabinet, and the Full Council in supervising and monitoring the strategy and register regularly • Consider the training and development needs of members on supervising the council's risk
Recommendation 5 <i>Performance Management</i>	Cyngor Gwynedd should refine and merge its performance management arrangements, with a specific focus on showing contributions to: • Deliver the Corporate Plan • Link Corporate and departmental risks • Increase the opportunities for challenge by peers across and beyond the Council

- 3.2. In response, a draft Action Plan (**Appendix 3**) has been formulated, which outlines the actions and arrangements intended to be put in place to address the recommendations and support continuous improvement.
- 3.3. The Governance and Audit Committee must review the draft response, and it can make recommendations to change or adapt the response.
- 3.4. In accordance with legislative requirements, a copy of the final Panel Performance Assessment report, and the Council's response to the recommendations, must be published and provided to the Panel Members, the Auditor General for Wales, Estyn and Welsh Ministers.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1. The report and draft response, as well as any recommendations for change by the Governance and Audit Committee will be submitted for consideration to the Council's Cabinet on 10 November. The report and final draft will be submitted to the Full Council for adoption on 3 December with a recommendation that they adopt the response.
- 4.2. Publish a copy of the final Panel Performance Assessment report and the Council's response to the recommendations, and provide them to the members of the Assessment Panel, the Auditor General for Wales, Estyn and the Welsh Ministers.

Appendix 1 - The programme for the week of the Panel's visit

Appendix 2 - Cyngor Gwynedd Panel Performance Assessment Report: March 2026

Appendix 3 - Action Plan in response to the Recommendations from the Panel Performance Assessment