

**REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC SAFEGUARDING
PANEL
2022-23**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The report gives an overview of the work of the Strategic Safeguarding Panel over the period April 2022 until March 2023 outlining the work undertaken by the Council themselves, and by the Council in partnership with others.
- 1.2. The report considers the arrangement that was in place and the intention regarding panel arrangements for the future.

2. RESPONSIBILITIES AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- 2.1. The aim of the Strategic Safeguarding Panel is to ensure that appropriate arrangements and procedures are in place at a corporate level across the Council to ensure the safety of children, young people and adults. Since 2017/18 the Panel is also responsible for an overview of wider safeguarding issues across Gwynedd, such as Community Safety.
- 2.2. The Panel in turn is accountable to the Statutory Director of Social Services, who has the final accountability for safeguarding issues.
- 2.3. The Chair of the Panel for the period in question was Councillor Dilwyn Morgan until October 2022, and then Councillor Menna Jones, Cabinet Member for Corporate Support. See the Terms of Reference in Appendix 1, which includes a list of the Panel's current members.
- 2.4. The Safeguarding Operational Panel supports the Strategic Panel to implement its priorities and to deal with practical issues in this area of work. This is an internal panel of officers, with the safeguarding champion of each Council department serving on it, to ensure ownership of safeguarding issues by the whole Council.
- 2.5. Parts of the Council's performance in the safeguarding field are assessed by independent external inspectors as part of their work in assessing wider performance. Reference is made to relevant reports within this report.

3. PROGRESS AGAINST SAFEGUARDING ISSUES

- 3.1. An increase was seen in the number of safeguarding referrals to social services in Gwynedd since the start of the pandemic lockdown period (2020 onwards).

3.2. Safeguarding Children

- 3.2.1. The number of referrals made to the children's services increased from around 5,000 before the pandemic to **7,175** during 2022-23. The work pressure on the service was overwhelming and the workforce was extremely busy supporting our children and families.
- 3.2.2. However, the increasing pressure meant that the Children and Supporting Families Department found it difficult to recruit and retain qualified staff. The Statutory Director of Social Services leads a group which considers recruitment challenges and the current salaries of the workforce.
- 3.2.3. The fact that 84% of child protection reviews have been held within the statutory timetable during the year is evidence of the excellent work of the workforce during this period. The percentage of risk assessments submitted to a Case Conference which were considered as exhibiting quality in decision making was also **98%**.
- 3.2.4. Gwynedd is the only authority to hold all its Child Protection Case Conferences face to face following the pandemic, something that has been identified as very good practice by Care Inspectorate Wales.
- 3.2.5. At the end of the year there were **68** children on the Child Protection Register and **281** children in care and 65% of these were being looked after in a foster placement, with 36% of foster carers being either friends or family and 22% of looked after children were placed with their parents, and therefore remained at home.

3.3. Safeguarding Adults

- 3.3.1. There was an increase in the number of reports of Adults at Risk received from **654** during 2021/22, to **714** in 2022/23. However, on average, **95%** of the initial s.126 enquiries into safeguarding referrals are completed within the statutory period of 7 days.
- 3.3.2. From the Adults at Risk reports received, the risk was managed in **98%** of cases compared to **84%** for the previous year. However, it is felt that the increase mainly derives from the improvements in recording outcomes rather than a change in practice.

- 3.3.3. Regular visits were held to monitor the county's care homes, with a small number of homes being considered under the 'Escalating Concerns' procedure for various reasons, mostly including lack of management, documentation problems, and lack of overview. There are concerns about the human resources of the Quality Assurance team and their ability to visit every service, especially domiciliary care, and we rely on specific reports in this field regarding the quality of care and its provision.
- 3.3.4. There was concern about the DoLS (Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards) service during the year as some individuals were on the waiting list for up to 3 years. Whilst this type of experience and situation is shared with other counties, it is not good practice and the service must prioritise individuals according to their risk.
- 3.3.5. It was expected for the Government to introduce a new system which would be easier to operate, but this was delayed due to the pandemic. The Safeguarding Adults Senior Manager was part of the national Liberty Protection Safeguards Steering Group and a LPS Database Questionnaire was completed for Social Care Wales.
- 3.3.6. However, we have now received confirmation that the new LPS system will not be introduced and the challenge of managing the DoLS applications will need to be considered further.

3.4. **Education**

- 3.4.1. The **Annual Safeguarding Survey** was held by the Designated Lead Officer for Safeguarding in Education in March 2023. It was noted that:
- **87%** of the "Main Safeguarding Persons" in schools had received specific safeguarding training over the past two years;
 - **70%** of Gwynedd School's Designated Governors had also received the relevant training for their role in the last two years;
 - **97%** of Gwynedd schools had introduced Basic Safeguarding Training for all staff before the end of the Winter Term;
 - **100%** of Gwynedd Schools noted that they were confident that all school staff and volunteers know what to do if a child discloses information about abuse.
- 3.4.2. There was a change to the management team of the Education Department, and a new Well-being and Equality Officer was appointed. This role will promote Equality and Well-being across Gwynedd's Education Services.

3.4.3. Efforts have started regionally to review the **Reasonable Force Policy** following a few cases that have emerged recently. This work-stream will be important during 2023/24 in order to reconcile what is meant by reasonable force.

3.4.4. At the end of March 2023, **183** parents were choosing to home school their children, following an increase seen during the pandemic. It was noted that the main reasons for home-schooling were anxiety and mental health problems of the parent and pupil. For safety and well-being reasons, it is important for the authority to keep contact with these families, and we managed this with **146** children. However, **9** families objected any contact (in accordance with their rights).

3.5. **Domestic Abuse**

3.5.1. There is good co-operation between the Council and relevant Organisations and efforts to promote the importance of reporting and identifying domestic abuse continue. In May 2022, the Council received the 'White Ribbon' accreditation which acknowledged the effort of engaging with men and boys, changing culture and raising awareness on violence against women. Officers from the Corporate Support Department took the lead in securing the accreditation and then set up the action plan together with the 'White Ribbon' organisation.

3.5.2. By now, the Domestic Abuse e-module is mandatory for all members of staff. It is vital that the workforce receives the training to ensure that the Council is doing everything within its ability to support individuals and to raise awareness. 'Ask and Act' training is also promoted in order to give staff confidence to help individuals who experience violence, domestic abuse or sexual violence.

3.5.3. We must remember that not all Council staff members have easy access to the Council's IT systems, and this creates a barrier. The Corporate Support Department is looking at the induction programme to try and ensure that everyone completes the e-modules on their first days of starting their job.

3.5.4. The Community Safety Partnership works closely with the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Regional Advisor (North Wales). Following a Domestic Homicide Review the Partnership monitors the action plan quarterly to ensure that everyone that was part of the review implements the agreed changes.

3.5.5. Currently, the Welsh Government are in consultation on the Domestic Homicides Review arrangement and are looking to establish a Single Unified Safeguarding Review (SUSR). This process would simplify the current arrangement by combining the current processes of the Adults Practice Review, Child Practice Review, Mental

Health Homicide Review, Domestic Homicide Review and Offensive Weapons Homicide Review.

3.6. **Crime**

3.6.1. As a result of the cost-of-living emergency an increase of **14.7%** was seen in cases of offending by theft locally. This was driven mainly by an increase in Shoplifting, that falls within the Theft and Handling category. The Partnership works with the Police and external agencies to respond and to see what support is needed in the community.

3.6.2. The Community Safety Partnership is preparing for the Serious Violence Duty, that will become statutory in January 2024. The Duty makes it a requirement for specified authorities to work together to prevent and reduce serious violence, and the types of serious violence that take place in the area would need to be recorded, the causes of such violence (as far as is possible), and to prepare and implement a strategy to prevent and reduce serious violence in the area. A regional task and finish group has been established recently to implement the duty and prepare a strategy.

3.7. **Modern Slavery and Ethical Employment in Supply Chains Declaration**

3.7.1. The cases of Modern Slavery in the area relate mainly to drug misuse. The North Wales Police and Crime Commissioner Office raise awareness of Modern Slavery amongst authorities and businesses across the region.

3.8. **Counter Terrorism**

3.8.1. Cyngor holds a Public Places Group: Preparedness to Safeguard and Protect, as well as being a member of the equivalent regional groups. The purpose of the Group is to:

- Collaborate with organisations to provide effective and efficient protective security arrangements in Gwynedd;
- Provide an integrated security approach, that corresponds with the national standards and guidelines, to identify and provide proportionate actions to keep communities safe in Gwynedd;
- Improve and support the preparedness to safeguard and protect in accessible public locations in Gwynedd.

3.9. **Atal/Prevent**

3.9.1. The Home Office has created new training for Prevent, and by now the e-module is mandatory for all members of staff. In Gwynedd, the e-learning portal is used to track the numbers that complete the training which means that it can be specifically addressed to encourage staff in some departments or fields. The rest of North Wales authorities have reported that collecting data is an obstacle for them as they, differently to Gwynedd, use the external link.

3.9.2. Following the success of the three benchmarks last year, during 2023/24 the Community Safety Partnership will concentrate on:-

- 1) Create a Training Plan to increase the number that take advantage of the Prevent training
- 2) Work with regional partnerships to develop a Prevent Communication and Engagement Plan
- 3) Develop a Venue Hire Policy for the Council and partnerships

3.10. **Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)**

3.10.1. The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) is responsible for processing criminal checks. The purpose of DBS checks is to help employers make safer recruiting and licensing decisions, although the check is only one part of the recruitment process. When the check has been processed and completed by the DBS, the applicant receives a DBS certificate.

3.10.2. The Operational Group has undertaken some significant work to verify, challenge and revisit the corporate procedure regarding the DBS. As a result, Departments now own more of the DBS procedures and this has transformed how the Operational Group reports on its compliance with departmental disclosures.

3.11. **Refugees**

3.11.1. With Russia starting to invade Ukraine in February 2022, during the year refugees that had to flee the country were welcomed. A Welcome Centre was opened in the county to provide accommodation for up to 80 individuals, as well as working with residents and local charities to offer accommodation for up to 200 others in homes across the county.

3.11.2. Robust arrangements are in place to protect the refugees, and to also safeguard those that were offering accommodation. All who offer accommodation for a refugee are subject to safeguarding checks, accommodation assessment, safeguarding training, information packs and contact with a support worker.

3.11.3. In addition, every individual from Ukraine seeking asylum in Gwynedd are subject to safeguarding checks, receive safeguarding training, welfare visits, contact from support workers and they are offered trauma support, resettlement and mental health support.

3.11.4. The safeguarding arrangements in place have meant that the Council with the support of the Police and Home Office were able to prevent 5 cases of unsuitable sponsorship on the basis of safety.

3.11.5. In addition, 1 case was seen where a child had arrived in Gwynedd unaccompanied by a parent / guardian and the Council called for the support of the Aftercare Team to ensure the safety and support of the young person while arrangements were put in place to reunite them with their family.

4. PRACTICE REVIEWS

4.1. Wales has developed a Child Practice Review (CPR) framework to improve the culture of learning lessons from child protection cases. 'Brief' or 'extended' reviews exist depending on the circumstances of the child in question. They are undertaken by the North Wales Regional Safeguarding Children Board with the aim of learning lessons to be shared in order to try and avoid such cases in the future.

4.2. The North Wales Safeguarding Adults Board also conduct Adults Practice Reviews, in accordance with the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. The purpose of these Reviews is to note the lessons to be learnt from complex and difficult Adult Safeguarding cases, and to implement changes to improve services as a result of these lessons.

5. PARTNERSHIP WORKING

5.1. Although the Strategic Safeguarding Panel focuses on corporate responsibilities regarding safeguarding issues within Gwynedd, it also receives information and guidance via Regional Safeguarding Boards for Safeguarding Vulnerable Children and Adults working across north Wales. These are Statutory Boards with cross-agency membership and specific statutory and legal responsibilities. The Council is a member of these Boards and contributes to implementing their plans. Further information regarding the work of the Boards can be seen here - <https://www.bwrdddiogelugogleddcymru/>

5.2. The Gwynedd and Anglesey Community Safety Partnership has also shown that working in partnership across county borders is proving to be a success. The Community Safety Partnership Manager is also vice-chair of the Safeguarding Operational Group and is a member of the Strategic Safeguarding Panel. The Partnership's work in areas such as Prevent are essential if the Panel is to ensure the quality of safeguarding arrangements in Gwynedd.

5.3. Several organisations have a statutory duty to be part of the partnership, including Local Authorities, Police, Probation Services, Fire and Rescue Service and the Health Board. Information on all aspects of community safety that the Council is involved with is on our [website](#).

6. THE FUTURE

6.1. Although excellent work is happening within the departments on safeguarding, the Panel intends to reflect on the working arrangements of the Strategic Panel and the Operational Group to ensure effective action.

6.2. In terms of the Panel's priorities for the coming year, it is intended to concentrate on the following priorities:

- Domestic Abuse and violence against women and work on a White Ribbon action plan;
- Re-establish the Operational Panel after the new membership and chairmanship is established in 2023;
- Ensure that safeguarding systems across the departments are effective and efficient.