

# Annual Report of the Corporate Parent Panel

# 2023/24



## 1. Introduction and context: The Role of the Corporate Parent Panel

- 1.1. Cyngor Gwynedd and its partners have statutory responsibilities to act as corporate parents for looked after children.
- 1.2. Children and young people come into the Council's care under very difficult circumstances, but the Council is as ambitious for these children as anyone would be for their own children. The aim is to live life as happy as possible. Any child that is looked after by the Council has the right to expect the same from their corporate parent as any other child would expect from a good parent.
- 1.3. This means that the Council will:
  - Understand their needs, talents and dreams, and will support their interests;
  - Be ambitious about their future and will expect the best from them and on their behalf;
  - Celebrate their successes and support them through challenges;
  - Listen to their opinions and incorporate these in services and policies;
  - Ensure that they are part of planning their own lives and include them in decisions;
  - Acknowledge, support and respect their identity in every way;
  - Promote and support their educational attainment to the best of their ability, ensuring access to a high standard of education and extensive learning opportunities;
  - Support their health and emotional well-being;
  - Provide a safe and stable home where there is a sense of belonging;
  - Support their journey from childhood into adulthood and promote their economic potential that contributes to society as a whole.
- 1.4. To support this role, the Council has established a Corporate Parent Panel. The Panel has a specific and direct responsibility to ensure that appropriate and suitable multi-agency services are available and are of a high quality, accessible and meet their needs. There is collaboration with partners to ensure the best possible outcomes for each looked after child.
- 1.5. Membership of the Corporate Parent Panel includes:
  - Chief Executive (Chair)
  - Cabinet Member for the Children and Supporting Families Department
  - Cabinet Member for Education
  - Statutory Director of Social Services (also the Children and Young People's Lead Director)
  - Head of the Children and Supporting Families Department.
  - Head of Education
  - Children's Services Manager, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board

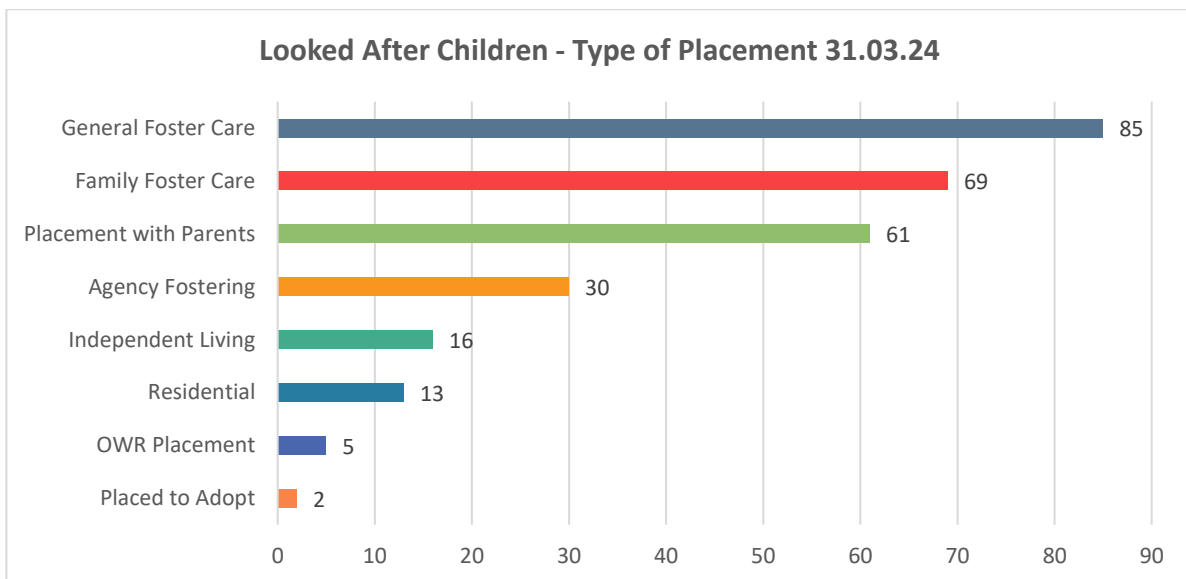
## 2. Data: Overview of the previous year

2.1. The following information is presented based on the end of quarter four figures 2024. It includes the comparative figures from the previous five years:

Looked after Children on 31 March	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of looked after children at the end of the year	253	291	281	273	281	281
Number of children coming into care during the year	66	82	46	46	59	65
Number of children leaving care during the year	40	44	56	54	51	65
Number of children who are Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers	1	1	0	3	15	14

2.2. On 31 March 2024 there were **281** looked after children, the same number as the previous year. However, it's important to highlight that although the overall total remained unchanged, some children left care during the year while others entered care, reflecting shifts within the group.

### 2.3. Type of placement



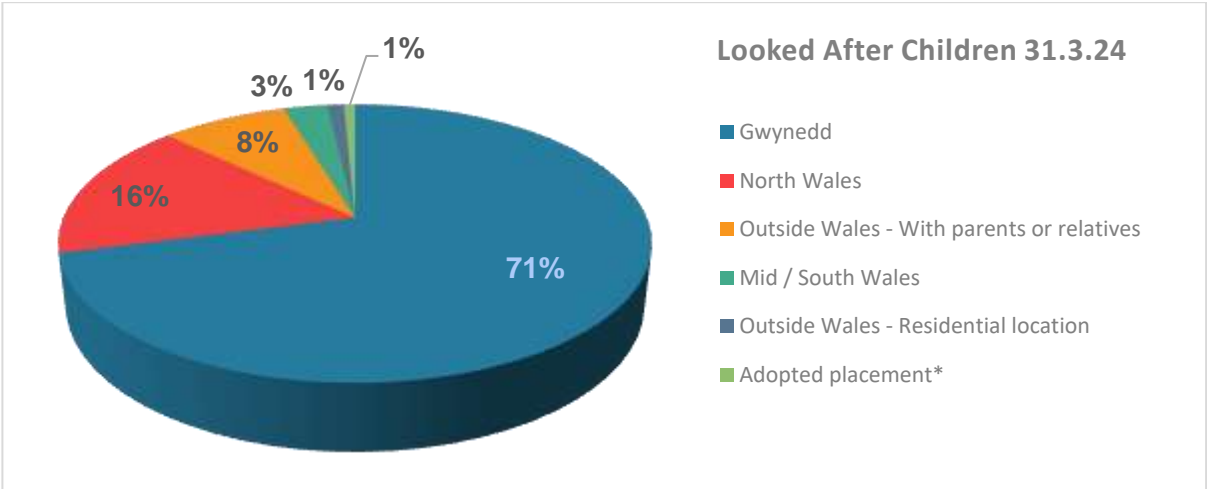
2.3.1. As the above graph shows, of the **281** looked after children in our care at the end of March 2024, **184** (65%) were in foster placements, **13** (5%) were in residential placements and **61** (21%) were placed with their parents. There were **2** children in adoptive placements at the end of the quarter with **16** young persons living independently with support.

2.3.2. Unfortunately, during 2023/24 unregistered placement arrangements (OWR) had to be used for **5** young people. Historically, our use of unregistered placement arrangements has been very rare, and this increase now reflects the national situation, with most, if not all authorities forced to make such an arrangement due to the lack of registered placements across the United Kingdom. This is especially true of teenagers with intense and complex needs or who have experienced a placement breakdown due to challenging behaviour. The team is actively working to secure registered placements for the young people, and it is anticipated that the number will decrease early on in 2024/25.

2.4. Geographical location

2.4.1. At the end of the year, **198** (70%) looked after children were placed in Gwynedd. **45** (16%) of children were placed in North Wales, with **29** (10%) of these children placed in neighbouring counties (Anglesey and Conwy).

2.4.2. For some children, there is a choice for the Council to place them with general foster carers in the County or with extended family. The extended family may live outside the boundaries of Gwynedd and therefore the child will be placed out-of-county, but the placement will continue within the extended family. A total of **26** (9%) children were placed outside Wales, with **3** of these in residential placements and the rest are either in placements with parents or relatives.



\* These placements are not disclosed as it is sensitive information

## 2.5. Number of children entering care during the year

2.5.1. During the whole year **62** looked after children, came into care compared with **59** during 2022-23.

2.5.2. The following table shows the ages of the children that came into care during 2023/24. **37%** of the children who entered care during the year were under five years old, with most of them having been on the Child Protection Register as part of safeguarding processes before entering care. This is due to several reasons, but specifically, the abuse and neglect of young children; emotional abuse; domestic violence; substance misuse; and mothers whose previous children had entered care becoming pregnant and not having made the necessary adjustments in their lives to be able to safely care for the child.

Under 1 year old	1 - 5 years old	6 - 10 years old	11 - 15 years old	16+
12	14	8	16	12

## 2.6. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

2.6.1. Please note that the Council has received **29** Asylum Seekers through the Home Office Transfer Scheme since December 2022. The majority come from Afghanistan, although small numbers have arrived from other countries such as Iraq, Turkey, Vietnam and Egypt. **14** of these were looked after children on 31 March 2024 (and **15** have by now left care).

2.6.2. Asylum seekers represent **18%** of the children who entered care this year. Very little background information is available in these cases, and identifying suitable placements is the main challenge due to their age, linguistic and cultural needs and very often due to the serious trauma they have experienced.

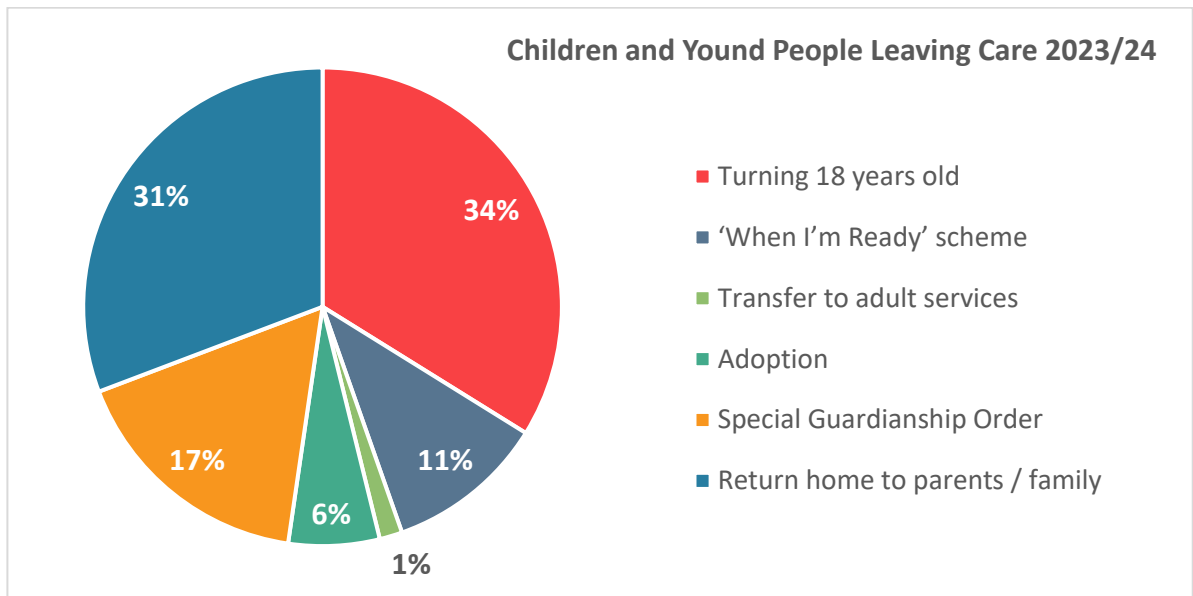
2.6.3. Of the **14** who are currently looked after, **2** have been placed in a fostering placement in Gwynedd and **12** are placed out-of-county.

2.6.4. This work is a significant addition to the Post-16 Team's workload, with the additional complexity of cases, translation arrangements as well as the work that needs to be completed by the Home Office as part of the Right to Remain applications. In order to try and respond to the increasing pressure the Council has ensured that the Post-16 Team receives additional resources, and two new temporary posts have been created.

2.6.5. The Council retains responsibility for each of them whilst the Home Office considers their individual cases.

2.7. Number of children leaving care during the year

2.7.1. During the whole year **65** children left care. **29** young persons turned eighteen years old, with **7** of them remaining with their foster carers under the 'When I'm Ready' scheme and **1** transferred to the Adults Services with complex needs. **6** children returned to their parents' care following brief periods in care. A care order was completely revoked for **15** children. A Special Guardianship Order or a Supervision Order was made for **11** children (which means that they are no longer looked after children). Adoption Orders were made for **4** children during the period.



2.8. Support to prevent children from becoming looked after

2.8.1. The Council offers different tiers of support for families - varying from the Team around the Family, which intervenes early when problems emerge, to more intense support from the Trobwynt Service for children who are about to come into care. The teams work closely with families, understanding their challenges and collaborating with parents to improve their situation. This approach helps prevent placing children in care unnecessarily.

2.8.2. Between April 2023 and March 2024, the Trobwynt Services worked with **178** children. The team started working with **112** new cases during this period. During the year, the team's intervention ended for **108** children. **72** of these lived at home with their parents without a

care order at the start of the intervention. At the end of the intervention **61** (85%) continued to live at home.

2.8.3. The Service worked with **26** parents with one or more looked after children to support them to break the cycle.

2.8.4. The following quote demonstrates an appreciation and the importance of the team's work, completely transforming the lives of some families:

***"I'm not sure that I'd be the person I am today without you there guiding me, listening to me and teaching me all the things I now know. Thank you again for everything."***

*A parent who received support from the Trobwynt Service*

### 3. The Panel's actions over the year

#### 3.1. A stable and safe home

3.1.1. Stable placements are essential to create a sense of belonging and security in the life of every child. When a looked after child needs to be placed, the wish is to keep them close to their family and home area. We therefore focus on finding ways of accommodating and providing care to children and young people closer to home, so that they can continue to be part of the community and maintain their support networks.

3.1.2. Local foster care of the best quality is integral. The Council is proud of its ability to offer foster care of the highest standard and it invests in recruiting, assessing and registering the county's foster carers. At the end of March 2024 there were **68** general foster homes registered with the Gwynedd Maethu Cymru Service. This is in comparison to 71 in 2023.

3.1.3. Practical and professional support is provided to all foster families. At the end of the year, **7%** (19) of the looked after children in Gwynedd had experienced three or more moves in their placement. This is a little higher than the percentage for 2022/23, namely **5%**.

3.1.4. Sometimes individual circumstances mean that there is a need to place a child in a residential placement. This raises a combination of factors that may include complex needs, challenging behaviour, previously unsuccessful foster placements or specialist needs that means that a placement in a family environment would not be suitable.

3.1.5. The demand for residential placements is greater than the supply, which is a significant challenge to local authorities in terms of finding placements that are as close as possible to the child's home area. At the same time, the Welsh Government's commitment was seen to totally remove private profit within the arrangements for looked after children.

3.1.6. The Small Group Homes is a Project in the Council's Plan for 2023-28 that seeks to address this need. The proposal is to develop registered residential homes run by the Council for small groups of up to two children, which will allow them to receive care in Gwynedd, attend local schools, and fully participate in the lives of their communities.

3.1.7. During 2023/24:

- The first property was purchased in the Dwyfor area to be converted into a residential home.
- A Project Manager has been appointed who will work to develop the new scheme.



- A Business Case has been completed for the establishment of the Small Group Homes.
- A Capital Application was submitted for the purchase / conversion of a property via the ICF programme.
- A 'Statement of Purpose' and policies have been developed for the development as they will be required to register the unit with Care Inspectorate Wales.

3.1.8. We hope to appoint a manager soon in 2024/25 to open the home before the end of the year. The work of looking for properties or other sites continues in order to develop more residential homes.

### 3.2. Supporting health and well-being

#### 3.2.1. Health Assessments

3.2.1.1. The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 states that all looked after children must have a health assessment. When a child comes 'into care', a community paediatrician should undertake an initial health assessment (IHA) within 28 days. **55** New Health Assessments were meant to be undertaken during the year, with **18%** undertaken within the required timetable. Delay is caused by the limited timeframe available, the timely sharing of information and the clinical capacity of the paediatricians. Although some are late all assessments are usually completed within a few days of the target date.

Number of Assessments to be undertaken	Number of Assessments completed	Number of assessments on time	Number of late Assessments
55	53	10	43

*\* 1 refused assessment and 1 not carried out up to 31.3.24*

3.2.1.2. A looked after child is also expected to receive a regular Health Review Assessment (every 6 months for a child under 5 years old and every year for a child over 5 years old). **280** of Health Review Assessments were meant to have been undertaken during the year, and **66%** were undertaken with the required timetable. **82** were late due to problems with carer illness, cancelling appointments, families on holiday and unavoidable changes to placements.

3.2.1.3. During the year, the Health Board began reviewing the collection and reporting of Children in Care health assessment data and reporting structures, to identify improvements that will aid more timely completion going forward; with training was

completed at regional level across the Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board area to ensure consistency.

3.2.1.4. During 2024/25, the Panel will also look in greater detail at the health assessments' data, scrutinising the width and scope of waiting times. They will investigate barriers and delays, and any measures which can be taken to simplify the system.

### **3.2.2. Mental Health**

3.2.2.1. Looked after children are more likely to experience mental health issues due to their circumstances and experience of trauma. At the end of March 2024, **25** of the **281** Looked After Children in Gwynedd, were open to the Children and Adolescents Mental Health Services (CAMHS) with another **14** on the waiting list. Another **111** looked after children have emotional or behavioural issues, and receive services such as Action for Children, NSPCC or Looked After Children Advisory Services.

3.2.2.2. CAMHS practitioners work closer with the Looked After Children's Team to identify and provide support. The pilot work continued with foster families, with the aim of setting a baseline for mental health well-being for children coming into care. The intention is to identify problems earlier, based on reports from carers, and to offer a timely intervention when needed.

3.2.2.3. Feedback was gathered from looked after children and their carers to gain a clearer understanding of the services they require. An application was submitted to establish a specific post with CAMHS, with the intention of carefully assessing the type of support required to ensure that we satisfy the mental health and well-being needs of every looked after child.

3.2.2.4. The RAP (Repatriation and Prevention) Service, which is commissioned by Action for Children, also offers intense intervention and access to counselling and therapy sessions to support parents and foster carers to manage challenging behaviour and secure stable placements. The following is a case study highlighting the importance of this service:

### **Beca's Story\***

Beca, 9 years old, was struggling to cope in foster care, and her behaviour caused her first placement to break down completely. A new foster home was found for her, and Gwynedd RAP Service intervened to prevent another breakdown.

Beca's challenging behaviour stemmed from her desire to return home. She began attending therapy sessions, providing a safe space where she could build trust. During the sessions she had the opportunity to draw and create pictures and this helped her to express herself better. Over time, she came to understand her emotions, her relationship with her family, and the confusion surrounding her removal from home.

Beca attended **41** sessions over **18 months**. Her placement settled down and she later returned home to her parents' home. With continued support Beca and her family are thriving.

*\*Name changed to protect privacy*

3.2.2.5. There is close collaboration between the Post 16 Team and the Health Team to complete timely referrals to the young people's substance misuse service - 'Be Di'r Sgôr'. During 2023/24 a nurse was appointed to work closely with care leavers and specific gaps were highlighted for support in the transition to adult mental health services. The post enables the provision of targeted support and preventative work for this group.

### **3.2.3. Neurodevelopmental Service**

3.2.3.1. The challenges in the neurodevelopmental field persist and nationally there is an increasing demand for diagnosis which has led to pressure on the service.

3.2.3.2. There are currently **20** looked after children referred to the Neurodevelopmental Service and are waiting to be seen, however, due to the increase in referrals, the waiting list is now over two years. During 2023/24 discussions began between the Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board and the Welsh Government about improving the neurodevelopmental service.

3.2.3.3. In Gwynedd a new Autism Service was launched in 2023/24. The team provides information, advice and support (IAA) to help autistic persons and their families make informed choices and access appropriate services. They work with the Derwen Team to support young people diagnosed with autism, offering courses and workshops to develop independent living skills and a better understanding of their autism.

### **3.2.4. Immunisations**

3.2.4.1. The Children in Care nursing Team work very closely with the Gwynedd Immunisation teams to ensure our Children in Care have up to date immunisation status wherever possible. Of the 281 Gwynedd Children in Care and the 44 placed in Gwynedd but are cared for by another authority, 252 currently are up to date for their immunisations.

3.2.4.2. There can be many reasons why children have incomplete immunisations, including lack of consent, movements between areas, illness and cancellations; or the final immunisation of a course may not be due for a few weeks or months and therefore would be recorded as incomplete until the course is finished.

### **3.2.5. Training**

3.2.5.1. Looked after children Nurses have been providing ongoing training to newly qualified school nurses and Health Visitors. Training has also been provided to acute hospital services to explain the steps to take when a looked after child is admitted to hospital.

3.2.5.2. The service attended an event hosted by the Gwynedd Fostering Team in September to promote health and well-being and provide a referral and advice service on the day. They intend to hold another similar event in May.

## **3.3. High-quality education**

3.3.1. As the National pilot period has concluded, the role of the Virtual Head of Looked After Children has been included in the responsibilities of the Education Department's Well-being and Equalities Officer. The Well-being and Equalities Officer, in conjunction with the Looked After Children Co-ordinator, ensures the best provision for LAC children, looking at outcomes from the start of their time at school to post-16.

3.3.2. During the year, monitoring work and quality assurance of LAC Personal Education Plans continued by training and supporting schools on how to formulate them effectively, including bespoke educational and welfare targets.

3.3.3. Schools were further consulted to establish a system and timetable to collect data and information on pupils' progress on a regular basis. By undertaking this, results can be analysed against the pupils' target levels as well as easy access to progress reports and annual reports.

3.3.4. As a result of a change in Government funding, the method of planning, delivering and evaluating the use of the Development Grant for LAC was adapted using two models:

- **Individual Bursary Grant** - Each LAC child, through their school, foster parents or social worker, will be able to apply for up to £500 to meet the learner's individual needs. Expenditure and applications are closely monitored to ensure effective expenditure and best value for money.
- **Cluster Grant** - Each Cluster of schools receives a certain amount of funding (depending on numbers of LAC children) to fund effective collaboration between schools by sharing successful practice and/or funding relevant training. The school is required to submit summary applications outlining the proposals to ensure quality and value to the funding.

3.3.5. A full examination series for GCSE qualifications was introduced in summer 2023. The results for LAC indicated that:

- **20** Gwynedd pupils were looked after children in their last year of statutory education (year 11) and were pupils who had been looked after for over 12 months.
- All pupils have had the opportunity to sit a wide range of external exams such as GCSEs, BTEC, Entry Level and the Welsh Baccalaureate in accordance with their interests and ability.
- The majority have successfully progressed to suitable college courses or on to Year 12 in schools.
- Results vary from pupil to pupil, reflecting the unique abilities of each learner. While one child achieved excellent results with 10 A\*, it is important to recognise that success should be evaluated based on individual circumstances and attainment.
- Several have taken the opportunity to receive the Government's LAC Individual Bursary Grant to develop elements of their education.

3.3.6. Over **800** school staff attended 'Trauma informed school' training in September 2023. General training will be offered again soon in the autumn term. Data received from schools includes:

- **93%** of schools undertook the trauma informed training.
- Over half of schools have at least one member of staff who has achieved diploma level training.
- **15%** of schools have between 2-5 members who have achieved the diploma.
- Over half of Gwynedd's schools have undertaken management team training.

- Over **75%** of schools have undertaken the overall whole staff training.

3.3.7. In future, the Virtual Headteacher and LAC Coordinator will:

- Develop and offer a menu of training to schools to support LAC children.
- Continue to organise general 'Trauma informed schools' training for Gwynedd schools.
- Evaluate the new system of distributing the LAC funds and to adapt these as needed.
- Implement the schedule and arrangements to collect and analyse pupils' progress and outcomes.

### 3.4. Raising awareness and taking responsibility

3.4.1. Further Corporate Parent training sessions have been organised for all Council Elected Members. Unfortunately, attendance remains low and discussions are underway to ensure that more Members take the training and are aware of their statutory duties in this field.

3.4.2. With Gwynedd hosting the 2023 Eisteddfod in Boduan, we took the opportunity to host a "Sgwrs o'r Galon" (*Conversation from the Heart*) discussion session where foster carers from across Gwynedd were seen talking about their personal experiences and the reasons they fostered, as well as the support available from the Council and partners.

3.4.3. In addition, it was ensured that foster families were able to claim a free day pass to attend the Eisteddfod field, with a food voucher and travel ticket also offered. **27** foster families took advantage of this offer.



### 3.5. Fostering Offer

3.5.1. During 2023/24 the Panel looked at the development of the support package for foster parents, taking into consideration benefits such as free Leisure Centre membership, Council tax discount and a free pass to Council car parks. We hope that the *Fostering Offer* will encourage and attract more to become foster parents in Gwynedd, and show our appreciation to the loyal, dedicated and experienced carers we already have.

3.5.2. A Task and Finish Group was convened during January 2023 and a request was made to all Council Departments to look at what it could offer to be innovative to attract more foster carers.

3.5.3. The package is scheduled to be formally submitted to the Cabinet during 2024/25, before proceeding to establish the offer.

## 4. Priorities for 2024/25

4.1. During 2024/25 we propose to:

- Implement the *Fostering Offer* to encourage and attract more to be foster parents in Gwynedd;
- Continue to monitor the Small Group Homes project (part of the Council's Plan 2023-28), whilst eagerly awaiting the opening of the first home during the year;
- Scrutinise the length and scope of the waiting time for health assessments, looking at the main reasons or barriers for any delays;
- Look at the steps needed to become a "Trauma Informed Council", giving consideration to the implications of any additional resource that would be needed;
- Hold further training sessions in order to make sure that all Council Elected Members are aware of their statutory duties in this field.
- Resubmit the Corporate Parenting Strategy to the Cabinet, committing to the principles incorporated in the Welsh Government's Parenting Charter.