

Introduction

A Response Plan was adopted by Cyngor Gwynedd's Cabinet in January 2025 to collate all support, reviews, audits and other work streams responding to the crimes relating to the head teacher, Neil Foden.

Objectives

Six main objectives were identified for this Plan when it was presented to Cabinet in January 2025. An additional seventh objective of 'accountability' has since been adopted by the Board and there may well be additional objectives as the situation becomes clearer after reviews and investigations are completed over time.

1. **Acknowledge** openly and publicly that such offences should never have happened, and that no child should suffer such experiences.
2. **Apologise** sincerely to the victims and survivors and their families for what they have had to suffer.
3. **Support** the victims and survivors, the school and the wider community to seek to recover their situations.
4. **Establish** all the facts of the case, the history around the situation and the wider context.
5. **Learn** all lessons identified as part of the findings and recommendations of all investigations.
6. **Improve** by responding in full and at pace to all findings and recommendations with the aim of giving confidence to the public that we are doing everything possible to ensure that no one will suffer in the same way ever again.
7. **Accountable** by being open and transparent about our improvement progress and committing to measuring the impact of the changes we implement.

Response Plan Programme Board – Terms of Reference

The Cabinet commissioned the Chief Executive, Dafydd Gibbard to make arrangements to implement the contents of this Response Plan including establishing a specific Programme Board and to regularly report progress to the Cabinet.

I was appointed by the Chief Executive to take on the role of Independent Chair in February 2025. I am a Professor of Social Work at the Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre (CASCADE) at Cardiff University and a former Children's Commissioner for Wales (2015-2022).

The Response Plan Programme Board has since been established and is made up of Cabinet Members, Officials from Cyngor Gwynedd, representatives from Ysgol Friars and External Representatives/Active Observers including representatives from Estyn, Care Inspectorate Wales, Welsh Government, Children's Commissioner for Wales and the Regional Safeguarding Board (See [Appendix 1](#) – Terms of Reference). The full terms of reference continues to be reviewed to ensure that the right representation is around the table and the Response Board works effectively. I am grateful to everyone for taking the time to consider the content and direction of the workplan and for their ongoing contribution to this important work.

An important addition to the Terms of Reference has been an agreement that the Programme Board may collate observations and learning points that have implications beyond Gwynedd, and will report these to the appropriate national authorities – some of whom are represented on the Board.

A further amend is that the external representatives will meet each quarter in advance of the Board to discuss the Cyngor's progress and key questions arising. In this way, I am aiming to ensure that the Board maintains an important balance between advice-giving and challenge.

I will report on a quarterly basis to Cabinet Members on the progress of the Response Board workplan, and the functioning of the Response Board. This is the first of such reports.

Timescales

Timescales have been discussed with Board members upon its establishment and it has been agreed that the Board should continue to meet until all actions in the response plan are completed and Board members are satisfied that evidence in relation to the listed impact measures demonstrates effectiveness of these actions.

As Chair, I will review the likely timescales of the Response Board in the autumn of 2025, when the complexity and scale of work required following the publication of the Child Practice Review has been assessed, and report on this to the Board.

On the implementation of the Board's plan, it was noted that it is essential that neither this Response Plan nor any issue that feeds into any part of this Plan undermines any other work, such as the Children's Practice Review set up by the North Wales Safeguarding Board chaired by Jan Pickles. For that reason, I continue to liaise with the Chair of the Safeguarding Board and the Chair of the Child Protection Review (CPR) on an ongoing basis in the remit of my role.

Response Plan Progress

Since establishing the Programme Board in February 2025, four meetings have taken place and there has been regular correspondence in between meetings to ensure action is being taken.

I can report that Cyngor Gwynedd is making positive progress on several of the workstreams in the Response Plan.

As Chair, I have observed that senior officials who are part of the Board are keen to make genuine progress in the areas of work they are responsible for, and they have shown a willingness to hear and act on the advice of external members and the rest of the Board. In my assessment there is a commitment to learn and make meaningful changes. There is also an acknowledgement that this will not be a quick or easy process.

Several additions and amends have been made to the Response Plan on the advice of the Response Board since it was last presented to the Cabinet. Significant changes are:

- More emphasis given to children and young people's views and experiences being routinely sought at a school and county level.
- Measures being added to each of the workstreams so that the impact of each workstream can be measured, qualitatively and quantitatively.

Positive progress has already been made on several of the workstreams with 32 out of 63 of the tasks completed. This includes receiving and responding to the recommendations of a specialist safeguarding barrister (2019 Report) which is a key milestone and likely to be one of the most challenging aspects to date. Following discussion in the Board meeting in May, I am satisfied that the Council has made a suitable plan to respond to the recommendations in that report.

I anticipate that a significant point will be reached in the workplan when the CPR recommendations are presented to the Board in September 2025. There are likely to be significant additions and amends to the current Response Plan following this.

Although the Cabinet gave authority to the Chief Executive to establish and organise temporary resources and necessary staffing capacity to realise the contents of this Plan, resources continue to be one of the main challenges and I have been informed that there are continued discussions with Welsh Government around this. It is

anticipated that the issue of adequate resourcing will become more prominent depending on the recommendations arising from the CPR review.

The Board will continue to ensure that a clear communication plan is in place in order to updating everyone involved - most importantly the victims and survivors, their families and the wider community, as well as elected members and other key stakeholders. Media scrutiny has been significant to date and Gwynedd representatives have found value in holding briefing sessions with the media in order to ensure there is an honest dialogue in terms of the messages reaching the wider public. There is a continued awareness of the need to ensure the right balance between safeguarding the victims and survivors and the need to update the public on matters arising.

Looking ahead, I am confident that the Board, will be able to navigate the evolving workplan and play a part in ensuring recommendations are delivered.

Workstream updates

The Response Plan is a working plan that is reviewed regularly by the Board. The Response Plan includes many tasks and sub-tasks and follows four key workstreams including;

Work Stream A	Supporting the victims and survivors	Do everything within our ability to support the victims and survivors. Establish a caring relationship with the victims and survivors and ensure that the Council and the victims and survivors are "on the same side"
Work Stream B	Ensuring we have the best possible safeguarding arrangements today so that the public has trust and confidence in them.	Ensure that our safeguarding arrangements are robust and of the best possible standard
Work Stream C	Establish what has happened, learn and improve	Do everything possible to ensure that we fully understand everything that has happened and have identified any weaknesses. Embrace and implement the recommendations in order to learn and improve.
Work Stream Ch	Supporting and stabilising Ysgol Friars	Ensure that the current standard of education continues to be maintained, that staff are confident and that the school's Governing Body leadership is stable and effective.

The Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee also have a key role in continuing to scrutinise the Plan as part of their work programme.

Actions are closely monitored within the Response Plan and are split into two categories;

- a. Actions that were time-limited in nature, completed and closed
- b. Actions that have led to changes to practices that will continue and become embedded in the local authority's work.

This will build over time into a running record that will form a record of embedded changes and ongoing safeguarding efforts that result from the response plan.

There are currently 63 tasks on the work programme, and they are varied in terms of priority level and the nature of timescales. 32 of these have been completed, 24 are being either worked on or are premature and 5 will be carried over as continuous actions.

Actions that are ongoing and integrated into Cyngor Gwynedd's regular work will be gathered and reported in this series of quarterly updates. The following are currently listed as ongoing actions that will become embedded into the local authority's work to ensure long term impact;

1. Ongoing offer of support to the victims and survivors with continuous guidance through the Support Workers and specialist organisations, e.g. Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre North Wales (RASASC North Wales).
2. Restructuring and establishment of Gwynedd Schools Safeguarding and well-being service
3. Visits to monitor and support safeguarding arrangements for individual schools annually
4. Training and support for Governors.
5. Continuing to improve performance in order to comply with the statutory deadlines for responding to Freedom of Information requests.

The following is a list of key milestones within the Response Plan over this first quarter. These milestones include the recommendations from the 2019 Barrister's Safeguarding Review Report, which Cyngor Gwynedd recently received and are now addressing.

- a) **Recommendations from the Barrister's safeguarding review report (2019)** – Cyngor Gwynedd commissioned an independent barrister who specialises in safeguarding investigations to carry out an investigation into the specific incidents in 2019 highlighted during Neil Foden's criminal trial. This detailed work is now complete and the following recommendations noted;
 1. **Arrangements for investigating safeguarding concerns** – The Council will put in place arrangements for dealing with concerns which do not reach the formal child safeguarding thresholds and is taking the opportunity to create a new system which could benefit this important field.
 2. **Record keeping** – Although the Barrister identified good practice in terms of keeping records of meetings, opportunities for improvements were also identified. As a result, record keeping arrangements for safeguarding matters across the Authority are being strengthened and a central recording keeping management system put in place. In addition, the record-keeping element within staff safeguarding training is also being strengthened.
 3. **Whistleblowing** – Whistleblowing arrangements for staff across the organisation is being strengthened.
 4. **Safeguarding training** – While staff in the Council's Children and Education Departments already receive a higher level of safeguarding training, arrangements are now in place to ensure that all staff in each department receive relevant training.
 5. **School safeguarding policy** – Steps are being taken to strengthen the procedures for school staff to follow in challenging safeguarding cases, including when to share information with governing bodies.
- b) **Freedom of Information Audit Report** - The Information Commissioner had been commissioned by Cyngor Gwynedd to carry out a specific audit into response arrangements. A report has been received and it has been acknowledged that there was a level of assurance already in place with experienced staff handling requests, and guidelines and documents already in place. There is some room for improvement and a detailed work plan will be put in place to address the recommendations arising including improving response rates to freedom of information requests and training provision. The work plan will be received and discussed at a future Board meeting.
- c) **Arrangements at Ysgol Friars** - Margaret Davies has started in the role as Temporary Head of Ysgol Friars since Easter and has ensured support to try and provide stabilisation at the school in terms of the staffing levels and support to the senior management team. Margaret is a member of the Board and will report to the Board on progress in the school. There are a number of matters in this workstream that are likely to take time to implement and will remain as continuous actions. e.g. school governance, the curriculum and ensuring that learners' voice and experience are heard.

Anticipated milestones:

- d) **Review of the response to a report by an Independent Complaints Panel in 2019** – full report is anticipated before the end of this term.

- e) **Child Practice Review** - A statutory CPR is being carried out by the North Wales Safeguarding Board, which is independent of Cyngor Gwynedd. It is anticipated that the workstream will adopt these recommendations once published in September 2025.

Note - All relevant documentation, e.g. the recommendations from the Barrister's safeguarding review report (2019) have been shared with the Child Practice Review as it is anticipated that similar recommendations could arise from different investigations.

Measuring Impact

The Board will continue to monitor and measure the impact of each of the workstreams, ensuring they align with strategic objectives and deliver meaningful outcomes for stakeholders. The following measures have been proposed but continue to be reviewed based on the recommendations of different reports.

Workflow	Title	Measures
A	Supporting the victims and survivors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Complete all work tasks b. Response from the victims and survivors through the support workers
B	Ensure that we have the best possible safeguards in place today so that the public has trust and confidence in them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Complete all work tasks b. Department for Education Annual Inspections - % schools inspected and compliant c. Estyn Schools Inspections - % of schools exhibiting appropriate safeguarding culture d. Feedback on satisfaction with support on safeguarding arrangements in schools by the Gwynedd Headteachers' Forum and the Gwynedd Youth Forums.
C	Research, learn and improve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Complete all work tasks b. Performance measure - Freedom of information requests c. Review and revise the impact of the measures for this workstream following the findings of each review or investigation
Ch	Supporting and stabilising Ysgol Friars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Complete all work tasks b. SHRN (School Health Research Network) results - Measuring self-reported learners' confidence in relevant questions in the 2025-26 school year compared to the baseline in 2023-4. Outcomes have influenced a whole-school approach to health and wellbeing' c. Feedback from meetings with the School Council e. Feedback from Union Representatives f. Questionnaires with different School stakeholders

Closing Remarks

Since the Response Plan was adopted by the Cabinet in January 2025, I am satisfied that progress has been made across each of the work streams, including improvements to monitoring arrangements for safeguards in schools and initiating multiple investigations.

Despite this, significant work remains to ensure the highest standards of child protection are in place and the Board will continue its detailed work of scrutiny and advice-giving to ensure that Cyngor Gwynedd delivers on this.

Whilst the Response Plan can seem formal in nature, we cannot for a moment forget about the most important ones in the midst of this, namely the girls who should have been safe in their school. The whole purpose of this Response Plan and every action we take is to do everything possible to prevent such crimes being committed by persons in positions of trust in Gwynedd, and that should always be at the top of our considerations.

Further information:

- [North Wales Safeguarding Board – Safeguarding children and adults across North Wales](#)
- [21.01.25 Cynllun Ymateb Adroddiad Cabinet S.pdf](#) and the full plan can be found here: [Appendix 1 - Response Plan.pdf](#)

Members of the public who have new information relating to possible child abuse are urged to report the matter directly to the Police or contact the Social Services Department of their local council.

Appendix 1 - TERMS OF REFERENCE – RESPONSE PLAN

Purpose:

- To verify and challenge the appropriate and timely progress of the four workstreams within the Response Plan.
- To verify and challenge whether the implementation of individual issues within each workstream is thorough and appropriate.
- To review the contents of the Response Plan as the situation develops and ensure that the Plan is adapted appropriately and in a timely manner to respond to the recommendations of the Child Practice Review.
- To report back to the Council's Cabinet regularly on the appropriate and timely progress of the workstreams.
- The Programme Board may collate observations and learning points that have implications beyond Gwynedd, and will report these to the appropriate national authorities – some of whom are represented on this Board.

Meeting organisation:

- Wherever possible, please arrange for a suitable senior-enough substitution who is able to report on your behalf, if you are unable to attend.
- Status of minutes and information shared at the meeting: confidential until in the public domain.
- All participants will be asked to declare any personal interest at the beginning of each meeting should it be necessary
- External members will meet quarterly for half an hour before the meeting starts to discuss satisfaction with progress and any questions we may wish to raise. This pre-meeting is to be attended by Gwynedd secretariat and notes taken, for transparency.
- Most meetings will include one or more substantial item per meeting, such as looking at one workstream in detail or considering a report (eg CPR).

Membership:

a. Chairperson:

Sally Holland, Chair

b. Elected Members:

- Nia Jeffreys (Council Leader) – CYNG/COUN
- Menna Trenholme (Deputy Council Leader) – CYNG/COUN
- Dewi Jones (Councillor) – CYNG/COUN
- Llio Elenid Owen (Councillor) – CYNG/COUN

c. Officials:

- Dafydd Gibbard (Chief Executive) – Leadership Team
- Dylan Owen (Corporate Director and Statutory Director of Social Services) – Leadership Team
- Geraint Owen (Corporate Director) – Leadership Team
- Gwern Ap Rhisiart (Head of Education) – Education Department
- Ian Jones (Head of Corporate Services) – Corporate Services Department
- Nia Grisdale (Legal Services Manager) – Legal Services
- Sharron Williams Carter (Assistant Head – Supporting Families) – Children and Family Support Department
- Sion Gwynfryn Williams (Communications and Engagement Manager) - Corporate Services Department
- Sarah Marion Jones (Communications Team Leader) - Corporate Services Department
- Margaret Davies (Head of Ysgol Friars)
- Rhian Parry Jones (Representative - School Headteachers Chairpersons Group)

d. External Representatives (Active Observers):

- Dyfrig Ellis, Estyn

- Sian Roberts, Care Inspectorate Wales
- Taryn Stephens, Welsh Government
- Nicola Edwards, Welsh Government
- Georgina Haarhoff, Welsh Government
- Rocio Cifuentes, Children's Commissioner
- Sara Jermin, Office of the Children's Commissioner
- Rachel Thomas, Office of the Children's Commissioner
- Geraint Davies, Regional Safeguarding Board

Note - Board membership may allow flexibility for others to join for specific items (depending on the agenda).

Reporting Arrangements:

The Programme Board – Response Plan will report to the Cabinet once every quarter on the development of the workstreams.

The Programme Board– Response Plan may collate observations and learning points that have implications beyond Gwynedd, and will report these to the appropriate national authorities.

Timeline:

The Programme Board will continue to meet until all actions in the response plan are completed and Board members are satisfied that evidence in relation to the listed impact measures demonstrates effectiveness of these actions. The Chair will review the likely timescales in the autumn of 2025, when the complexity and scale of work required following the publication of the Child Practice Review has been assessed, and report on this to the Board.