
THE CABINET TUESDAY, 8 JULY 2025

Present-

Councillors: Nia Wyn Jeffreys, Craig ab Iago, Dilwyn Morgan, Paul John Rowlinson, Menna Trenholme, June Jones, R Medwyn Hughes, Dewi Jones, Huw Wyn Jones and Llio Elenid Owen

Also present -

Dafydd Gibbard (Chief Executive), Geraint Owen (Corporate Director), Dylan Owen (Corporate Director), Iwan Evans (Monitoring Officer), Professor Sally Holland (Cardiff University), Catrin Love (Assistant Head Corporate Services), Joanne Parry (Customer Care and Registration Manager), Mari Powell Jones (Support Service Manager), Meinir Griffiths (Service Improvement Officer) and Annes Sion (Democracy Team Leader).

1. APOLOGIES

Everyone was welcomed to the meeting noting that it was now halfway through 2025, and that the last six months had proved challenging but that there was a sense of pride in the Council's achievements.

No apologies were received.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

There were no declarations of personal interest.

3. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

There were no matters arising from overview and scrutiny.

5. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10 JUNE 2025

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 June 2025 were accepted as a true record.

6. QUARTERLY REPORT - CHAIR OF THE RESPONSE PLAN PROGRAMME BOARD

The report was presented by Cllr. Nia Jeffreys.

DECISION

To accept the report.

DISCUSSION

The opportunity was taken, before Professor Sally Holland reported as the Board's Independent Chair, to acknowledge and thank the victims and survivors for their

courage highlighting that they are at the forefront of the Board's mind in driving this work forwards. It was noted that the Response Plan had been adopted back in January to collate all the support, reviews, audits and work streams relating to the response to the crimes. Attention was drawn to the objectives of the response plan published in January 2025. Soon after the plan was adopted, independent members were appointed to the Board and this report reported on the progress being made and any work outstanding.

Professor Sally Holland presented her report, reminding the Cabinet that the Response Plan had emerged following a breach of trust and criminal behaviour of a well-known headteacher employed by Cyngor Gwynedd. It was noted that such abuse often involved someone using their power over others, and in this case had involved age, gender and status. It was expressed that the Council was required to examine all its systems and ways of working to ensure and prevent such behaviour from happening again, and that a culture of being alert and challenging was in place. It was highlighted that a shift in culture would be much more difficult to measure than processes and policies.

It was explained that the Board's role was two-fold, namely to advise and to scrutinise the progress and developments of the Board's Response Plan. It was explained that the Board consisted of Senior Officers, Cabinet Members and Independent Members. It was noted that the Chair met the independent members separately on a quarterly basis to seek their views. It was explained that it had been written by the Response Board before the board had been appointed and, at their first meeting, it was explained that the Board had reviewed the response methods along with the objectives adding the important objective of accountability, to ensure transparency and measure the impact of any changes. It was noted that additional measures had subsequently been included. It was noted that the Board also highlighted any national issues such as how governance boards provide support and training.

It was noted that consistent progress had been seen since March, however it would take time to see the impact of the vast majority of these. It was emphasised that it was very easy to change policies but that changing ways of working would take time. It was highlighted that work had been undertaken to initiate annual visits to monitor safeguarding in every school in the county and that support had been given to the leadership and governing body of Ysgol Friars.

It was explained that the content of the plan had changed following advice from the Board, and that more plans to seek young people's views about their confidence in safeguarding had now been included along with recommendations received from an independent investigation. Attention was drawn to the willingness of officers and Cabinet Members to make a real change and to listen to the scrutiny being undertaken. It was highlighted that a Child Review Report would be published in September, which would be significant, and that the Response Plan was expected to change considerably following recommendations from this review, and the next quarterly report would highlight these amendments. It was explained that this work was resource heavy for the Council and that further resources would be required once the Child Review report was back.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- Gratitude was expressed for the report, noting that resources were still being identified as one of the main challenges, and it was asked what additional resources the Board would want to see coming into the process. The response given was that people are the resources needed, as officers - not only at a high-level - work hard to ensure that work is completed. It was explained that the September report would highlight the need to do more work and that more staff would be needed.

The Chief Executive added that there had been a change after the Board had been established and they were thanked for their work and input which had been a

positive challenge along with the support. It was explained that receiving the report in September would be another step change for the Council, and that continuing with the current resources would not suffice due to the volume of work being unsustainable. It was explained that planning work was currently underway and that more responses from people were needed and to find the right people for the roles.

- It was noted that the report highlighted positive progress and that 32 of the 63 tasks had been completed, however, it was asked whether this was as expected by the Board. The Chair replied noting yes, as the plan was a combination of various tasks with some being clearly noted as having been completed - such as appointing a new Headteacher for the school. It was noted that some tasks would never be completed as the Board needed to keep an eye to ensure implementation. Attention was also drawn to the fact that often when tasks are completed, others are included.
- It was asked whether the report therefore reported that the Council was moving in the right direction, but that a lot of work remained to be done. It was noted yes that the officers were doing well to move things forwards, and that the Council had taken immediate action but there were many challenges and that further resources were required to move at a pace.
- The Chairperson's comment about the Council's readiness to make a considerable change along with officers' willingness to collaborate was highlighted - officers were thanked for all their work.
- It was asked whether the support for victims was what they needed. It was noted that yes, although she was very limited to the information she could share. It was noted that the support was discussed at every meeting, and that they discussed the support available along with the duration of support. It was explained that they would attempt, through a third-party partner, to access information as to whether the support met the needs.

7. ANNUAL REPORT - Ffordd Gwynedd 2024/25

The report was presented by Cllr. Nia Jeffreys.

DECISION

The report was accepted.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented noting that Ffordd Gwynedd was one of the priorities in the Council's Plan. It was reported that the annual report reported on the progress of the plan and raised awareness of the developments to be seen in the nine work streams.

The Corporate Director added that Ffordd Gwynedd was a way of working, a mindset, a working environment and a culture in which to achieve and challenge performance. It was noted that an annual report had been included in the Ffordd Gwynedd Plan to measure progress, and it was explained that this was the second to be presented.

It was explained that measures in every service clearly indicated the level of success of putting the people of Gwynedd at the centre of everything they do. It was noted that this report gave further assurance that the foundation and support were being provided to deliver the best service for the people of Gwynedd. Minor changes to the governance system and the main achievements were highlighted, including the introduction of a manager development programme, a new learning and development framework along with a new-look Ffordd Gwynedd training programme.

It was emphasised that it was vital that staff heard about the Council leadership's

commitment - by Members and Senior Officers - to this approach. It was noted that the continuation of Apprenticeships, Cynllun Yfory (Graduate Scheme) and the Customer Care Charter and Standards were important steps towards achieving the vision of ensuring the best service for the people of Gwynedd.

Nevertheless, it was noted that the Ffordd Gwynedd culture had not become embedded everywhere and that there was inconsistency across the Council. It was noted that this would be a priority over the next phase. It was highlighted that although much praise had been noted in the latest series of the Scrutiny Committees, the failure to give timely responses to enquiries in some services had been criticised. It was also noted that there was a need to look further at the workforce in the long term to ensure the staffing level. However, it was noted that there was a firm belief that the commitment to Ffordd Gwynedd and its work culture would be seen in the long term.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- The opportunity was taken to thank the Corporate Director for over 40 years of service to the Council before his retirement.
- In terms of the pockets of services not having adopted Ffordd Gwynedd, it was asked whether the Leadership Team had committed to this approach and whether he was confident that this work would continue. The Director noted that he was completely confident that the Council's leadership was committed, however that this did not always mean that it had embedded everywhere.
- It was expressed that there was much talk about frustration but that it was moving in the right direction - however, it was asked what the biggest challenges were and what steps needed to be taken over the last three years of the plan. It was noted that the priority was for the firm foundations to be consistently implemented.
- A slippage in two work streams was highlighted - in terms of attracting staff and succession in key posts, and it was asked whether there were any firm steps to move the plans forward. It was noted that the slippage was due to there having been a focus on the success of plans such as Cynllun Yfory and Apprenticeships meaning that workforce planning had not received as much attention. It was noted that steps had been taken since the period of this report and that a group of officers had been formed to move the plans forward.
- It was emphasised that the report read well but needed to be distributed further to ensure that it was received by all members of staff, at all levels. It was noted that it was difficult to get the documents to everybody and, although steps had been taken by sharing at the Network for Managers and Team Leaders, that new ways of sharing information to further evolve Ffordd Gwynedd were needed.

8. CUSTOMER CARE PLAN

The report was presented by Cllr. Llio Elenid Owen

DECISION

The Customer Care Plan was approved.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented noting that customer contact was one of the priority streams of work in the Ffordd Gwynedd plan within the Council's Plan. It was highlighted that the plan was being presented following research, engagement and consultation with residents and staff. It was noted that the plan consisted of two clear elements, namely the Customer Care and Standards Charter. It was explained that the Charter outlined what customers expected from the Council and the behaviours expected by the Council

from customers, noting that the Standards set out a clear response timeframe so that both the customer and staff were aware of the expectations.

Attention was drawn to the difference of opinion during the consultation period and this was highlighted, which included some being glad to see a clear response timeframe whilst others raised concerns about the practical ability to uphold the standards. It was also noted that there was a difference of opinion in that some noted the need for higher standards for elected members. It was hoped that by setting clear standards, managers would be encouraged to conduct service reviews to identify challenges and to find ways of removing them by potentially looking at new opportunities such as AI.

It was noted that there had been a discussion on the word 'customer' which some were eager to change to resident - this was not suitable after being given some thought as the Council served beyond the "people of Gwynedd" such as businesses. It was noted that an Equality Assessment had been carried out to ensure that the plan met needs, supported vulnerable people and was age friendly. It was noted that the steps would be to engage residents and establish new training to ensure that managers and staff were aware of the expected standards.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- Attention was drawn to the difference in opinion about the clause "accept the final response and respect the decision" which had arisen in the presentation, asking why it was still in the decision. It was noted that it was fair to say that it came from staff bias, and that it was only fair if the customer was also allowed to challenge. Although the clause has been included, it was explained that it did not mean that a challenge could not be made, but that a point would come where the final response would have to be accepted and for the complainant to proceed to the Ombudsman's complaint procedure failing an agreement. It was noted that it had been included as a point of clear line.
- It was asked how the plan would include people with no access to technology or with disabilities. It was noted that the Plan was for everybody, and that there were steps in place for everybody to be able to contact through technology, phone arrangements, Siop Gwynedd, and it was highlighted that the training for Managers and Team Leaders on service design would ensure that they embraced all customers within a community.

9. STRATEGIC SAFEGUARDING PANEL ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

The report was presented by Cllr. Menna Trenholme.

DECISION

The report on the work of the Panel was accepted.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented stating that it highlighted how the Council met its statutory safeguarding duties. It was expressed through the panel and external audits that it ensured that safeguarding arrangements were robust across the Council. It was highlighted that there was a significant increase in referrals to the Children's Department noting that the cases were more complex than ever, and it was noted that there had been a serious incident at Ysgol Friars. It was noted that there had also been a gradual increase in adult referrals, which were more complex cases yet again. It was explained that the DOLs situation was still challenging, however that there were additional resources and investment.

It was noted that steps had been taken over the year to reinforce safety in schools, with most schools complying and high percentages having attended the training for staff and governors. It was noted that there had been an increase of 30% in the number of children being home-educated, however that there was regular contact with most families.

It was explained that the Council was eager to continue to raise awareness of Domestic Abuse, and that they were working proactively through training, multi-agency partnerships and case reviews. It was noted that there had been an increase in the number of cases of stalking and harassment, which had led to working with the Police to develop a profile to enable better learning. There had been a reduction in anti-social behaviours, but concern was noted that modern slavery was continuing.

The priorities for the coming year were noted as follows.

- Understanding and learning lessons from Practice Reviews during the year.
- Practice Reviews being published during the year.
- Complete an internal audit on the awareness and understanding of the Council workforce of safeguarding systems and how to make a referral.
- Ensure that the Council workforce have completed mandatory and statutory training in safeguarding.
- Promote the revised Safeguarding Policy amongst all Council staff.
- Ensure that the Designated Persons understand their role and take it seriously.

The Corporate Director added that everybody was at risk of becoming vulnerable as situations could change overnight. The fundamental principles of the field were noted which included empowering individuals to ensure that they can make decisions where possible, and that all Council staff were aware of their responsibilities to ensure safe communities and accountability. It was noted that the principle of accountability had been highlighted in the first report of this Cabinet.

It was noted that the Child Protection report was fine, and that they were ready for the report and for responses to any emerging recommendations.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- It was noted that the report elaborated on the safeguarding of Adults, however that it was not a familiar area of work for a number of people therefore some detail was requested. It was noted that support was available for individuals and that there was intervention when individuals did not have the capacity to make a decision in the interests of their safety. The need to see more referrals to ensure people's safety was noted and that communities were aware of the challenges faced by vulnerable adults.
- It was noted that there was a sense of pride in seeing matters relating to on-line influences, toxic masculinity and the impact on boys and young men being given the attention they deserved, however a question was raised as to whether there was adequate support for staff. It was noted that the Council worked closely with the Men At Work charity, who are experts in the field.
- Pride was expressed that the report noted that there was more money for the social work workforce. It was added that the number of child referrals had increased dramatically over the last few years, and they were glad that 5 new posts had now been filled as the level of work was unsustainable. It was noted that DOLs work was still challenging for Adults, and that money had been received to tackle the work, but unfortunately appointments could not be made to the posts and the Department was looking at alternatives to fill the gap.
- Awareness was raised of the work of the Community Safety service, highlighting the exceptional work undertaken by the small team.

10. COMPLAINTS AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

The report was presented by Cllr. Llio Elenid Owen.

DECISION

The report was approved.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented noting that the annual report had been publishing the Ombudsman's letter too, however it was highlighted that the letter had not yet arrived. It was noted that the number of complaints had fallen but that the number of complaints that had gone to the Ombudsman had increased. It was explained that the number of complaints had fallen pre-Covid but had steadily increased since then. It was highlighted that the response time, and not acknowledging the complaint, was 17 days on average. It was noted that work was ongoing to strengthen collaboration and to change the mindset that complaints were a way to improve the service. Attention was also drawn to the achievements wall that highlighted the good work by the services.

The Assistant Head of Corporate Services noted that this report tied in with the Customer Care Plan as lack of response was one of the main complaints made to the Council.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- It was asked what the reason was for the increase in complaints going to the Ombudsman - it was explained that the increase was due to a heightened understanding of the complaints procedure.

The meeting commenced at 1.00 pm and concluded at 2.30 pm

CHAIRMAN