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# Our Bravery Brought Justice- Cyngor Gwynedd Response Plan

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*"We cannot for a second forget about the most important people in all of this, the children who should have been safe in their school. The whole purpose of every step that we take is to do everything possible to ensure that nobody will suffer in the same way ever again and this should be our main consideration at all times."*



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## 1. Summary of the background

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Neil Foden, former headteacher of Ysgol Friars in Bangor, was arrested on 6 September 2023, in his workplace following a disclosure by one of the victims. He faced 19 charges, including 12 charges of sexual activity with a child and two charges of sexual activity with a child whilst he was in a position of trust. The criminal proceedings involved five girls over a period of four years.

In May 2024, after a three-week hearing at Mold Crown Court, the offender was found guilty. On 1 July 2024, he was sentenced to 17 years in prison.

Following his conviction, the North Wales Safeguarding Board established a Child Practice Review (CPR) under an Independent Chair, Jan Pickles, to establish the circumstances of the whole matter, learn lessons and prevent similar cases in future.

Between September 2023 and the court case, the investigations into the allegations against the offender took place. This was a criminal investigation led by the Police. With many historical allegations, some of the victims and survivors were now adults and therefore the enquiries about the offences were undertaken by the Police only. For the allegations where the victims and survivors were children at present, these investigations were undertaken in accordance with [Wales Safeguarding Procedures 2020](#). This included interviews and joint investigations between the Children Services and the Police.

In accordance with good practice in such investigations, it was crucial that no action was taken during the criminal investigation which may have undermined the Police's ability to investigate an offence. The investigations were undertaken during the period in accordance with [Part 3](#) and [Part 5](#) of the [Wales Safeguarding Procedures 2020](#). The Council led on the processes under [Part 5](#) of the Procedures to manage and moderate the investigation's activities.

Following the conviction by the Court, in June 2024, the North Wales Safeguarding Board stated immediately that it would open a Child Practice Review. The [North Wales Safeguarding Children Board](#) (NWSCB) is a statutory body under the [Social Services and Well-being Act \(Wales\) 2014](#) and its responsibility is to co-ordinate, monitor and challenge its partner agencies when safeguarding children in North Wales.

The objectives of the NWSCB are to:

- **PROTECT** children in its area who are being, or who are at risk of being, abused, neglected or experience other types of harm at present, and
- **PREVENT** children who are, or who are at risk of being abused, from being neglected or experiencing other types of harm.

The NWSCB notes that its function is to make "Safeguarding everybody's business". The partner agencies are the six local authorities across the region (Cyngor Gwynedd, Isle of Anglesey County Council, Conwy County Borough Council, Denbighshire Council, Flintshire Council and Wrexham County Borough Council), North Wales Police, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, the National Probation Service and the Community Rehabilitation Company.

The Regional Safeguarding Board appointed a Chair to lead the CPR, Jan Pickles, a very experienced individual who has been leading high-profile reviews of this nature and who has been specialising in safeguarding children matters for years (further details can be found in part 5 below). Jan Pickles

visited Council Members on 11July 2024 in order to outline the work ahead of her and the procedure of fulfilling that work. The CPR is led, without doubt, by an experienced, specialist and passionate individual in the field and we as a Council are pleased about that.

We have benefited greatly from Jan Pickles' advice and guidance over the past months. A CPR of such a serious and complex nature as this is unfamiliar to the majority of Cyngor Gwynedd officers and Members and we are treading new ground on a daily basis. This situation is completely unprecedented; therefore, receiving the advice of a recognised expert has been invaluable.

It was originally intended for the CPR to aim to reach conclusions within approximately 6 months, which is the usual timeframe for a CPR. However, the scale of the Review has been extended considerably since then and its terms of reference are broader and more thorough. It is certainly not a usual CPR and the terms of reference place an expectation on the investigators to consider events back to 2017 (two years prior to the arrest would have been usual). This was welcomed and naturally the timeframe for completing the work has had to be extended as well. The final report, Our Bravery Brought Justice, was published in November 2025 and consequently this plan has been revised and updated in order to reflect the findings of the report.

At the time, it was considered that the CPR was initially best-placed to consider all the facts and reach meaningful conclusions. Consequently, we did not wish to hold our own review or investigation which would not be considered as good as the CPR, or which would cast any shadow over our trust in the statutory and independent process of the CPR. Consequently, the Council did not undertake its own formal reviews or investigations between June and October. Having said that, as outlined in this Response Plan, this did not prevent us from undertaking several steps to ensure that we responded appropriately to the situation.

Following discussions with the Char of the CPR in the autumn of 2024, it was concluded that it was appropriate by then for the Council to move more swiftly with some aspects of our response rather than wait for the findings of the CPR before undertaking our own investigations, for several reasons, including:

- the change in the CPR timeframe in order to extend the scope of the work,
- the substantial work of gathering and presenting the Council's evidence to the investigators of the Review has now ended,
- new information which came to light as time went on of which we were unaware at the beginning,
- the substantial press coverage, attention on social media and the public interest in the case has led to findings which we do not know if they are correct or not.

Those Investigations and Reviews have been completed, and the various findings and recommendations stemming from these investigations and reviews have been added to our plan and the Response Board will monitor the progress of action. We have stated clearly from the beginning that we will embrace all the recommendations from every investigation and will implement them in full and without delay. In addition, further investigations will be carried out where necessary, to ensure that all aspects are thoroughly considered.

This Response Plan explains what we will do in order to try to fulfil our objectives in relation to all of this, and particularly so following the publication of the 'Our Bravery Brought Justice' report.

## 2. A statement of the Council's position

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Before setting out our objectives, it is important that the Council states its position entirely clearly.

The offender's actions have had a deep and shocking impact on the victims, their families, the school, community, staff and Members of the Council and the entire county.

The essence of a Response Plan such as this is that it is formal in nature, as it refers to several organisational matters. However, we cannot for a second forget about the most important people in all of this, namely the children and young people who should have been safe in their school. The whole purpose of this Response Plan and every step that we take is to do everything possible to ensure that no one suffers in the same way ever again and this should be our main consideration at all times.

As a responsible public body, the Council states and recognises that the offences committed were abhorrent and devastating for all the victims and survivors. We wish to apologise to all victims and wish to guarantee that we will do our best to discover all the facts and will embrace every lesson that needs to be learned in order to improve things in the interests of future generations.

We will prioritise our resources to respond to the conclusions of all investigations that have already been completed by us as a Council and the statutory CPR. We will collaborate with the Children's Commissioner for Wales and we have invited her to offer input and advice on all our actions.

In addition to the CPR, the Council has also called on the Welsh Government to hold a Public Inquiry into all the circumstances surrounding this serious offending. It is Welsh Government that has the statutory powers to establish a Public Inquiry

We wish to leave no stone unturned, and be completely open and transparent. Otherwise, it will be impossible for us to fulfil our objectives effectively.

### 3. Child Practice Review Report - November 2025

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As noted in the first part of this Plan, the North Wales Safeguarding Board established a Child Practice Review (CPR) immediately after the court judgement and the Council stated its full support to the Review and committed to do everything possible to support it as well as implement all the recommendations immediately. Establishing a CPR is customary in all cases where there has been abuse or neglect and a child has died or been seriously harmed.

Chair of the CPR, Jan Pickles, is an extremely experienced individual who has been leading high-profile reviews of this nature and has specialised in safeguarding children matters for many years. She is a registered social worker with extensive experience with the Probation Service, the Police and the NSPCC. She is a former Designated Safeguarding Officer at Westminster Council and is a former assistant Police Commissioner in South Wales. She was a member of the National Independent Safeguarding Board Wales for six years, until May 2022.

Amongst her recent work, Jan Pickles has led on and taken part in several high-profile investigations, including chairing the CPR into the sad case of Logan Mwangi in Bridgend. She is the author of the review into historical cases of child abuse in Winchester College and she chaired a review in a prominent school in London and worked as part of the review into historical cases (from the 1970s) of child sex abuse at Chelsea football club. She has also recently completed an independent review of historical cases of child abuse at Caldey Island monastery.

The Chair was supported by two independent investigators, Jane Foster and Anna Henderson, who are experienced in work of this nature. The investigators gathered evidence following a structured process with the initial phase focusing on meeting the victims and survivors and spending time at the School, meeting with relevant professionals and members of the public who had information they felt would support the review process.

Timelines, chronologies and analysis were submitted by 14 agencies, and the Investigators attended the School in July 2024 - nine days were spent on site to meet with over 80 members of staff and another 60 were interviewed over the course of the review.

The Review Panel has focused on key matters such as the behaviour of the offender and professional behaviour. Governance and disclosure management arrangements are also included in the scope of the review.

The following agencies were a part of the Review

- Cyngor Gwynedd
- Isle of Anglesey County Council
- Conwy County Borough Council
- North Wales Police
- Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board
- North Wales Probation Service
- North Wales Regional Safeguarding Board

All the evidence that is in the ownership of each agency was pieced together and presented to the Researchers to create a single detailed timeline of all relevant events.

In response to the developing situation, we used an external consultant to identify the cases of children and staff linked to Ysgol Friars and created an initial chronology with the intention of identifying any matter that required urgent attention. This information was submitted in its entirety to the CPR.

The Terms of Reference were reviewed regularly by the Child Practice Review Panel, to reflect any new concerns that the review identified. The final terms of reference have been published on the Regional Safeguarding Board's website ([Terms-of-reference-extended-child-practice-review-21.05.25.pdf](#)).

The North Wales Safeguarding Board provided regular updates to the Welsh Government Safeguarding and Advocacy Unit regarding the progress of the review, and the review was published in November 2025.

The Council also met with the Chair of the Panel regularly to receive updates on the process by her throughout the period of the review and two-way information sharing happens regularly and effectively.

## Publication of the Child Practice Review - 'Our Bravery Brought Justice'

On 4 November 2025, two years after the arrest of the offender and eighteen months after his sentencing and starting the Review, the Child Practice Review report 'Our Bravery Brought Justice' was published. The report is very critical of several organisations, particularly so the Council and Ysgol Friars. The Review had identified a significant number of missed opportunities and raised a number of questions about the appropriateness of decisions over the years. This report proposes several recommendations, at a local and regional level, but also at a national level. The report is particularly critical of the fact that recommendations from the Clywch review (2004) had not been implemented nationally and that a great many of those recommendations have to be repeated in this CPR report.

A statement on behalf of the Council was shared publicly on the afternoon of the publication:

*"The responsibility for many of the failures listed in this report lie with Cyngor Gwynedd. For this, we apologise unreservedly.*

*As painful as the report is to read, we welcome its contents, we accept all its finding and recommendations and promise that we will continue to put all our energy into responding, as the people of Gwynedd would expect of us.*

*Two years on from the arrest, it is also a relief to be able to speak openly about this matter. Today, as we see all the pieces of this heartbreak story drawn together for the first time, our thoughts **must** turn to those who suffered, and who survived. Children who had every right to be safe at school were betrayed. Once again, we express our respect and admiration for the courage you showed in standing up to a bully and a paedophile.*

*We sincerely apologise to all of you. You should not have had to suffer at the hands of a man you should have been able to trust. Your courage drives us to do better.*

*This report highlights the fact that opportunities were missed on far too many occasions and as one of the organisations that should have acted to prevent the offender, we failed in our response.*

*A school headteacher should have put the welfare and safety of children at the top of his priorities at all times. Instead, he committed serious offences against them.*

*This was a man who had portrayed himself as a responsible educator on a local and national level, both within the teaching unions and in the media. But he deceived school staff, the Council and other organisations, as well as the pupils and parents who had put their trust in him.*

*This review gives us the clearest possible understanding of what went wrong, and how we have to put things right. This report is a vital tool as we strive to improve.*

*Professor Sally Holland, the former Children's Commissioner for Wales, who chairs the Council's Response Board, has reported that we are making progress in implementing a number of improvements. But we still have a lot of work ahead of us, and Professor Holland, and the other institutions who are represented on our Board, will continue to provide constructive challenge in a transparent manner.*

*Whilst we cannot undo the pain caused, we can fulfil our responsibility to implement local improvements. But ensuring other reforms will require national change.*

*Over the years, we have seen recommendations made by numerous Wales and UK-wide investigations, but these have not led to change.*

*Hopefully, the findings of this CPR will be a watershed moment in transforming the safeguarding of children in Wales. All children must be safe – wherever they live and whichever school they attend.*

*We are grateful to Jan Pickles and her team for their tireless work over a twelve-month period. They have managed to go far beyond what is seen in reviews usually.*

*To finish, I make no apology for returning to the most important people in all of this – the children who should have been safe at their school. The whole purpose of this report is to ensure that individuals and public organisations do everything possible to try to ensure that **nobody** suffers in the same way ever again.*

*In situations where an organisation is under the spotlight, there is sometimes a tendency to be defensive. I promise today that for Cyngor Gwynedd, this will not be the case.*

*We will not hide from our responsibility to do whatever it takes to protect children today and into the future."*

Following the publication of Our Bravery Brought Justice, this plan has been reviewed to ensure that we respond appropriately to the recommendations noted in the CPR. The intention to review the Plan following the publication of the CPR had been stated clearly from the beginning.

## 4. Objectives of this Response Plan

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Seven main objectives have been identified for this Plan. The final objective was added by the Response Board in its first meeting.

We commit to:

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 nobody will suffer in the same way ever again.
7. **Be accountable** by being open and transparent about our improvement progress and commit to measure the effect of the changes that we implement.

As we go about fulfilling the above, it is crucial that we take an open and transparent approach at all times. In this respect, the Communication Plan in part 8 of this Response Plan is crucial in order to ensure that we share information clearly, consistently and in a timely manner with all relevant stakeholders.

## 5. How do we intend to fulfil our objectives?

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In order to fulfil our objectives in full, we will focus on four work streams as shown below. It is only by taking thorough, complete and timely actions to fulfil all the objectives of this Response Plan that we can have peace of mind that we have done everything possible to ensure recovery.

<b>Work Stream A</b>	<b>Support the victims and survivors</b>	Do everything within our ability to support the victims and survivors. Establish a caring relationship with the victims and survivors
<b>Work Stream B</b>	<b>Ensure we have the best possible safeguarding arrangements today so that the public has trust and confidence in them.</b>	Ensure that our safeguarding arrangements are robust and of the best possible standard
<b>Work Stream C</b>	<b>Investigate what has happened, learn and improve</b>	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.
<b>Work Stream Ch</b>	<b>Support and stabilise Ysgol Friars</b>	Ensure that current education standards continue to be maintained, that staff are confident and that the school's Governing Body and leadership are stable, firm and effective.

Many of the initial tasks have been completed since the publication of the original plan in December 2024. Therefore, following the publication of Our Bravery Brought Justice, these work streams were revised to ensure that the report's recommendations are a part of the Response Plan. We have re-packaged all these work streams to align with the report's themes, as follows:

	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Description</b>
Work Stream 1	Voice of the Child and Supporting Victims	Do everything within our ability to ensure that the voice of the child is central in relation to matters involving children, and embedded throughout all our activities. Do everything within our ability to support the victims and survivors and establish a caring relationship with them.

Work Stream 2	Managing allegations and concerns about adults working with children	Ensure that our safeguarding arrangements are robust and of the best possible standard
Work Stream 3	Training and Policies	Ensure that training packs are appropriate and that staff have received training suitable to their roles.  Do everything within our ability to ensure that the county's schools adopt and implement policies
Work Stream 4	School Governance	Offer the best possible support for our school Governors to equip them to exercise their roles.
Work Stream 5	Restrictive Practices	Do everything possible to ensure that all schools have implemented the practices and use of restrictive practices appropriately
Work Stream 6	Crisis Planning and Safeguarding Crisis Response	Ensure that the arrangements to plan and respond to crises are appropriate and that all staff know how to respond in a situation of safeguarding crisis
Work Stream 7	Support and Stabilise Ysgol Friars	Ensure that current education standards continue to be maintained, that staff are confident and that the school's Governing Body and leadership are stable, firm and effective.

Later in this Plan, we will explain the governance procedure for monitoring our progress and ensure that we take action in a timely manner. We must acknowledge clearly and openly that we have a long and challenging journey ahead to reach a situation where we would be satisfied that we have taken full and appropriate action.

## 6. The Plan's Work Streams

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### **Work stream 1 – The Voice of the Child and Supporting the victims and survivors**

#### **What has been achieved thus far?**

##### **1.1 - Direct Support**

Following the first disclosure on 6 September 2023, support was provided to the offender's victims in order to address their direct needs and to give them hope about the next steps. Speedy access was provided to support officers and specialist counsellors, with Police Victim and Survivor Liaison Officers leading from the first day.

The Police victim and survivor liaison officers sat on the Child Practice Review (CPR), ensuring that the voices of the victims and survivors are a core part of any discussion.

The support is ongoing with this work being monitored continuously by a regional partnership group which runs the Wales Victim Liaison Scheme, in which the Council plays a key role. The procedure is recognised nationally. Others affected have also been offered support.

Naturally, this support happens quietly in the background and is tailored specifically for the support needs of individual victims and survivors.

##### **1.2 - Wider support in the school**

The counselling services at the school were extended by collaborating with organisations such as the Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre (RASASC) North Wales, ensuring specialist support for victims and survivors and other pupils who could have been affected. Regular reviews are held to ensure that the support continues to be suitable and effective. Fortunately, Ysgol Friars collaborated with a local company to create a well-being centre on the site in 2023, as well as qualified staff, which has been beneficial as an appropriate space for recovery and emotional support.

We will continue to review the support regularly and the support is available to victims and survivors, pupils and staff. In addition, we ensure that more support is available at crucial times - for example, when there is public attention or breaking news in the press which affects individuals, including victims and the school community. Our priority is to ensure that the appropriate support is available for everyone who needs it, without delay.

##### **1.3 - Acknowledge and Apologise**

We have already acknowledged and apologised publicly for what the children and young people have suffered and part 2 of this Plan restates that formally.

However, that is only a public statement, and it is the Council's responsibility and wish to offer a personal apology to each of the victims and survivors. With the support of the Victim Liaison Scheme and the chair of the CPR, we established how to offer that personal apology.

It must be borne in mind that each of the victims and survivors has suffered and our wish in acknowledging and apologising is to offer some support towards their situation. It was essential that this work was led by the victims and survivors. We received advice and guidance from others who are more experienced in this field in doing this while being entirely careful that we did not do anything which would not be welcomed by the young girls.

Personal apologies have been made by the Council Leader and Chief Executive in the way in which each victim and survivor wanted to receive them.

#### 1.4 - Personal Support Plan

Since the Plan was adopted in January, we have made progress in implementing a personal approach to supporting victims and survivors. Individual discussions have now been held with the majority of them to establish their specific needs, including emotional support, access to therapeutic services and practical support. Not all victims wished to accept this offer. We have established a formal process to review the support regularly, ensuring flexibility to respond to needs that change over time. In addition, additional resources have been allocated to provide specialist support for children and young people who have experienced trauma, working closely with the Children's Commissioner and external partners to ensure that the provision is comprehensive and sensitive to their experiences. We will continue to prioritise the welfare of the victims by providing the appropriate support to help them face the next steps in their lives, reflecting the lessons learned from the review and commit to continuous improvement.

### **What else needs to be delivered in order to meet our objectives?**

#### 1.5 - The voice of the child

We acknowledge the importance of ensuring that the voice of the child is central to our response and our day-to-day activities. Following the recommendations of Our Bravery Brought Justice, we have committed to adopting a clear policy which ensures that every child which is the subject of a part 5 review has the opportunity to express their opinion in a direct conversation with a social worker. This work is already underway, including practical methods of strengthening children's participation in decisions which affect them. We will also continue to review and extend our training for staff in order to ensure that the voice of the child principles are embedded across all services, reflecting the lessons learned from the review and responding to the national expectations.

#### 1.6 - Wider work to ensure that children's rights are central and embedded in the Council's activities

We have re-framed our work streams to reflect the recommendations of Our Bravery Brought Justice, giving priority to ensuring that the children's rights, including the voice of the child, are central to all aspects of our activities. This includes developing one corporate "Voice of the Child" policy across all services, working with the Children's Commissioner for Wales to adopt best practices and establishing a task group with the Education Department to review and amalgamate current arrangements. In addition, we are strengthening the county youth forum to ensure representation of specific groups such as looked-after young people, Derwen children and young carers. This work will ensure that the views and experiences of children will directly influence policy, strategy and decisions, embedding the rights of the child principles in our organisational culture.

Additionally, we are working towards ensuring a "Child-Friendly County" status, collaborating with national partners to create an environment in which the rights and voice of children are respected and promoted in all fields.

#### 1.7 - Identify and act on grooming behaviours

Since the Plan was originally adopted in January, we have strengthened our response to the risks associated with grooming by implementing several definite steps. Amended training packs have been shared with the schools, including specific guidelines on grooming behaviours and how to identify them early. We have standardised safeguarding training across different education levels in order to ensure a consistent and co-ordinate approach. In addition, the role of a Safeguarding Champion has been established to support front-line staff and increase awareness of these matters.

Further work is underway to review the content of the training packs following the publication of Our Bravery Brought Justice, including the addition of modules on sexual abuse and methods of identifying risk behaviours. Further work is to be done and we will continue to work with national partners to ensure that our approaches reflect the best standard and give priority to child safety.

#### 1.8 - Reporting on concerns to individuals or services outside the school

All Gwynedd schools are required to display the details of the school's designated safeguarding persons including an external member of the governing body. This did not exist in the school in question at the time of the offender's arrest, but this has now changed. This is one of the matters that the Safeguarding Quality Officers check when they undertake their quality visits and is therefore monitored regularly.

Since the publication of Our Bravery Brought Justice, we have started consulting with pupils across Gwynedd schools to find the most effective methods of enabling them to contact a person or service outside the school to share concerns. Feedback to date emphasises the need for accessible, confidential and prominent options. As a result, we have agreed key principles to prominently display safeguarding services contact details and helplines in all schools, including on websites and public spaces; to provide training for staff to explain the referral routes; and develop a secure digital method to enable pupils to raise concerns directly. Consultation will continue to ensure that these arrangements reflect the needs of pupils and give priority to their voice.

#### 1.9 - Trauma-Informed Council

Cyngor Gwynedd has committed to become a Trauma-Informed Council in order to ensure that our services respond sensitively to the effect of trauma on individuals. This means building a culture which acknowledges and responds to signs of trauma, avoiding secondary trauma and promoting welfare. We have already started on this journey by providing "Trauma-Informed" training for over 1,000 school staff, and nearly half of Gwynedd schools have trained staff members to diploma level in trauma-informed schools and communities and mental health. We are also developing a baseline assessment across Council departments to identify gaps and priorities, working with the Public Services Board to ensure a co-ordinated approach. This work will set a foundation for policies and procedures which give priority to sensitive support, reflecting the higher risks among looked-after children and ensure that our workforce have the skills and knowledge to respond appropriately.

## Work stream 2 - Managing allegations and concerns about adults working with children

### **What has been achieved thus far?**

#### 2.1 - Corporate Safeguarding Arrangements

The Safeguarding Policy was reviewed during the second half of 2023, it was adopted by the Cabinet in February 2024 and the new version was submitted to the Full Council in March 2024. [Safeguarding Policy](#)

The Cyngor Gwynedd Corporate Safeguarding procedures focus on ensuring the safety and welfare of children and adults who are at risk of being abused or neglected. All Council employees, elected members and partners have a responsibility to create an environment in which safeguarding is prioritised and where abuse is less likely to happen.

All Council departments are tasked with implementing safeguarding measures as part of their everyday actions, while the Social Services have a specific lead role in addressing cases where individuals are already at risk. At a corporate level, the Council ensures that staff and Members have been trained thoroughly, provide clear routes for reporting on concerns, and use the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) to ensure safer recruitment practices.

The corporate safeguarding efforts are co-ordinated via the Strategic Safeguarding Panel and the Operational Safeguarding Group, which oversee and monitor performance, policies and departmental compliance. It is the Panel's responsibility to review and update the Safeguarding Policy regularly in order to ensure that it continues to be effective and responsive to any legislative or procedural changes, reiterating the Council's commitment to safeguarding those who are vulnerable in the community.

#### 2.2 - Safeguarding Arrangements in Schools

Since the offender's arrest, the Schools Safeguarding Policy and training pack for schools have been updated.

Since April 2023, the Education Department's Lead Safeguarding Officer has held Safeguarding Arrangements Monitoring visits at all schools in Gwynedd.

These visits include:

- Checking Safeguarding policies
- Checking training dates and levels
- Checking practical Safeguarding arrangements
- Asking the Safeguarding Designated Person, staff members and pupils about confidence levels and knowledge in relation to safeguarding
- Checking the content of the schools' Safeguarding Arrangements Annual Audit
- Offering general support / guidance.

Every school in Gwynedd has a Designated Safeguarding Person (DSP) who plays a central role in ensuring effective child protection and safeguarding. The designated person is a senior member of staff and he / she has the authority and expertise in safeguarding matters and the responsibility for co-ordinating the school's child protection policies and procedures.

The individual acts as the main point of contact for all safeguarding concerns, providing advice, guidance and support for staff. The task of the designated person is to keep records of safeguarding concerns, ensure timely referrals to appropriate authorities and train school staff ensuring that everyone understands their safeguarding responsibilities. Their role is central to nurturing a safe and supportive environment for all pupils.

The designated person works closely with the Education Department's Safeguarding Lead Officer, who provides specialist advice, support and oversight to ensure the effective implementation of safeguarding and child protection policies across all schools in the county.

Every school receives a model policy from the Education Authority and they are encouraged to make minor adjustments (e.g. amending the name of the school and designated safeguarding person to make it applicable to the school) and adopt this policy, which has been drawn up in line with the requirements of recognised guidelines and standards. It is the responsibility of the governors to ensure that effective safeguarding policies have been adopted and are reviewed at least once a year and continued support is provided to them to accomplish this. Governors must work with school leaders to create a safe environment, monitor compliance with safeguarding laws, and address any weaknesses or deficiencies in safeguarding practices in a timely manner.

The Education Authority already undertook Safeguarding inspections in every school every two years, which is above and beyond current requirements, but we have now increased capacity in the field and now undertake inspections our schools on an annual cycle. While there are no formal requirements for us to undertake such a programme, we believe that it is extremely important and we elaborate on this 2.6 below.

### 2.3 - Estyn's Inspection of the Council's Education Department

Estyn held an inspection of the Gwynedd Education Department in June 2023 and as part of any inspection of an education authority, the inspectors follow the following process:

*"In all inspections, inspectors must report on whether the arrangements of the local authority or other provider of education services for safeguarding satisfy the needs and are not a cause for concern, or do not satisfy the needs and cause serious concern.*

*"Inspectors will consider to what extent there is a culture of safeguarding across the education service which supports the welfare of all learners. Also, inspectors will consider how well the local authority or other provider of education services promote a culture of safeguarding in schools, PRUs and other providers who support the welfare of all learners.*

*"Inspectors will assess the robustness of procedures to check the suitability of staff and other people who are connected to children, including maintaining a record of all staff who work with children and the outcomes of appropriate safeguarding recruitment checks. Inspectors will review the procedures for training staff and will check that all staff know how to respond to child protection matters.*

*"In inspections of local authorities, inspectors will evaluate how well the authority fulfils its statutory responsibilities in relation to safeguarding. Specifically, they will evaluate whether the authority has effective safeguarding arrangements in place, including:*

- *strategic planning for, and oversight of, safeguarding in education, including reporting regularly to members*
- *appropriate support and guidance for all education services providers in its area, including the early years, play and youth support services*
- *pursue concerns noted during inspections of providers for which it is responsible*
- *appropriate safeguarding practice in its direct education services such as education other than at school, PRUs and the youth service*
- *that appropriate arrangements are in place to ensure that all partnership work that is carried out, co-ordinated or funded by the local authority keep to a high safeguarding standard*
- *that there are appropriate policies, procedures and reporting arrangements in relation to physical interventions and being pulled out of lessons*
- *pursue concerns raised by stakeholders, including parents and carers, staff and pupils of providers for whom it is responsible"*

Their findings on the Authority's safeguarding arrangements were accepted:

*"The head of education and his senior management team undertake their statutory role to protect and safeguard children robustly and effectively and relevant leaders at all levels understand their roles and responsibilities. There is a robust procedure for strategic and operational meetings in relation to safeguarding issues. The representation of the education services in these processes and as part of the Corporate Parenting Panel is consistent and influential. Leaders at all levels have developed a mutual understanding with corresponding officers in children's services. As a result, they work together intelligently and productively for the benefit of the authority's children.*

*"The corporate safeguarding policy is appropriate and the Education Services department provides a beneficial standardised safeguarding policy for schools, together with a large number of other relevant policies and guidelines. Clear guidance and valuable and beneficial support are given to headteachers and designated persons in schools by relevant officers, such as the designated safeguarding officer for education. Training arrangements for school staff at all levels, including governors, are robust. School headteachers welcome recent developments where the designated officer visits to check the quality and challenge the safeguarding arrangements of their schools. This has had a positive effect on strengthening the culture of safeguarding across schools in Gwynedd.*

*"The quality of implementation of Section 5 of the Wales Safeguarding Procedures, when there are allegations against professional staff, is extremely robust and very thorough. The support and challenge given to schools by other departments in the authority on safeguarding and health and safety issues is valuable and effective. This includes clear guidance from the property and personnel departments on specific issues and risk assessments. However, the authority has not considered risk carefully enough for the inclusion hubs. Safe recruitment arrangements are robust and consistent."*

In addition to that, following offender's arrest, there has been regular contact with the regulatory body and a meeting was held with them in December 2023. Following the meeting, the following comments were received from the inspector:

*"We appreciate the detail which you discussed with us, including the steps taken to ensure the welfare and safety of pupils and staff and temporary leadership and governance arrangements. It is obvious that you have responded without delay to this complex matter. We know that your response includes urgent steps in the short term,*

*comprehensive steps over the medium term and more strategic steps with the intention of offering long-term stability."*

Following the publication of Our Bravery Brought Justice, Estyn was invited to revisit the Council, this time to look at safeguarding arrangements only. Estyn and Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) were also keen to carry out an inspection in this area, and we were pleased when both bodies undertook a detailed joint Safeguarding inspection in November this year. This was an extremely detailed and thorough inspection by national specialists in Safeguarding by both organisations. We expect their report to be published in early 2026.

#### **2.4 - Estyn Inspections in specific Schools**

In accordance with the National Inspection arrangements by Estyn, every school receives a full inspection on a cycle of approximately 5 years. During COVID-19 this procedure was suspended across the country. Since restarting the procedure, 51 Gwynedd Schools have received a full Inspection which includes a part which looks at the Safeguarding arrangements, following a similar process to that explained above.

Each one of these schools reached the expected safeguarding standards.

#### **2.5 - Investigation into events in 2019 which have been the subject of press coverage**

During the court case there was reference to specific events in 2019. These events have also had considerable press coverage. As already noted, the timetable and terms of reference of the CPR were extended considerably since Jan Pickles attended a meeting with Council Members before the summer of 2024. Consequently, and in light of public interest in these specific matters, the Council commissioned an Independent Investigation into these specific matters in order reach conclusions sooner than the CPR timetable.

This work has already been carried out by Genevieve Woods, who is a barrister at Raymond Buildings, London. She specialises in such investigations and has collaborated with Jan Pickles in the past on such matters. She has extensive expertise and experience of working on safeguarding matters as well as implementing independent investigations.

She was commissioned to undertake an entirely independent investigation and not to represent the Council.

The purpose of the Independent Investigation is to establish all the facts of the events in question, consider their significance and relevance, decide whether acknowledged procedures were followed, whether appropriate action was taken under the circumstances, whether there are further steps the Council could consider and whether there are lessons to be learned.

The work has been completed and a copy of the full report was provided to the CPR and the recommendations submitted by the investigator have been transferred to the Response Board work programme.

#### **What else needs to be delivered in order to meet our objectives?**

#### **2.6 - Safeguarding Arrangements in Schools**

At the time of writing this Plan originally our staffing arrangements allowed us to hold Safeguarding Arrangements Monitoring Visits by the Lead Safeguarding Officer in every individual school every other year. We are not aware of other Authorities who do this in this way, but we believe that these inspections are valuable, and offer support to individual schools to ensure that their safeguarding arrangements are adequate and to offer them general support in this critical field.

It was concluded that it would offer more value if it would be possible to increase the frequency of these visits and that they happen every year in every school. We have therefore invested to increase the staffing resource we have in the Education Department in order to do this and strengthen our support structure for schools. We are currently investing in the Education Safeguarding and Well-being Team once more in order to be able to offer yet more support and challenge to schools on Safeguarding matters.

## **2.7 - Scrutiny Investigation into Safeguarding Arrangements in Schools**

Our scrutiny arrangements have a critical role to play as part of the Council's formal governance arrangements and given the seriousness of the situation we face it is quite appropriate for us to be scrutinising this field.

The item 'Safeguarding Arrangements in Schools' was added as an additional item to the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee's annual work programme after the annual workshop at the request of scrutiny members and the matter was scrutinised at the Committee meeting on 18 July 2024. Following that, the possibility of holding a Task and Finish Group or a Scrutiny Investigation into the area was discussed. It was concluded that further discussion should take place on 5 September 2024 where the members present expressed a wish to check and confirm that safeguarding arrangements are as tight as possible within our schools.

A brief for the Scrutiny Investigation was considered by the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee in February 2025 ([Brief - Safeguarding Arrangements in Schools Scrutiny Investigation.pdf](#)).

The main question being considered is - *'Are the safeguarding arrangements in the county's schools appropriate and implemented consistently?'*

## **2.8 - Input by the Children's Commissioner**

Following discussions between the Children's Commissioner, officers and Cabinet Members in July 2024 and November 2024, and then a further meeting between the Chief Executive and the Commissioner on 9 December, the Commissioner was invited to provide input to our Response Plan and to be a part of the procedure to monitor our progress on the various work streams.

That discussion is continuing and is a positive discussion.

We have stated our desire to collaborate openly and positively with the Commissioner and her officers and we appreciate the opportunities to have constructive discussions with them and receive their specialist and experienced input into fields such as these.

By now of course the Children's Commissioner is an observer on our Response Board and provides valuable challenge and guidance as we implement this Plan.

## **2.9 Section 47 and Part 5 Enquiries of the Safeguarding Procedures for Wales**

Part 5 Safeguarding Procedures in Wales are being reviewed nationally at present. It is recommended in the Our Bravery Brought Justice report that Welsh Government ensures that the new procedures

make it a requirement for the voice of the child to be considered even if a child has not made the disclosure. This has already been implemented and is included in the Voice of the Child Policy which is to be adopted in 2026.

We will ensure that other local authorities attend formal Section 47 and Part 5 meetings if they are relevant to a child from their area, and ensure the attendance of the Chair of Governors or a governor deputising on his/her behalf when it involves a pupil or staff member from a school.

We have also introduced measures to ensure that decisions on referrals do not fall on an individual and we will also be piloting new processes for referrals involving individuals in positions of trust and the first step will be to reach out to other agencies - North Wales Police specifically, to consider the practicality and resources needed to do this.

It is recommended that multi-agency arrangements are in place to discuss referrals before reaching a decision about individuals in positions of trust. The recommendation about this is specifically for the Government and until national changes have been made, our Children services will pilot it and are currently in discussions with the other agencies.

We have already introduced changes to Part 5 discussion procedures so that all information on a child's records is reviewed when assessing their risk and vulnerability.

When there is a disclosure or concerns about individuals in a position of trust, we have already strengthened the need to assess 'suitability to work with children'.

## 2.10 - Low-level concerns

It is necessary to strengthen and standardise the process of reporting low-level concerns, which are concerns that do not meet the safeguarding or child protection threshold, across our services. The 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' guidance requires schools in England to develop and implement a Low-Level Concerns Policy ('Adult Conduct of Concerns Policy'). One of the recommendations in the *Our Bravery Brought Justice Report* is that the Welsh Government should consider making this a requirement for schools in Wales as well.

While this matter is being considered at a national level, and rather than waiting for change, the Council will develop a centralised system to ensure that records are kept by Human Resources of any staff member who has been the subject of concerns under Part 5. These concerns will be clearly noted on the individual's HR records, with an appropriate flagging mechanism to ensure that the concerns are recognised and taken into account. As some staff members tend to move between neighbouring counties, we will explore the possibility of sharing this information with those local authorities until national guidance is in place.

Clear instructions will be developed to accompany this arrangement, to ensure clarity regarding responsibilities, roles, and implementation procedures.

## 2.11 - Learning from Our Bravery Brought Justice

We are currently creating an electronic version which will be promoted. We are trying to make it as accessible and easy for anyone to find it. We are also promoting an open culture whilst dealing with referral and are willing to receive information over the phone rather than waiting for a form to be filled before dealing with a matter. We will encourage flexibility when discussing thresholds.

## 2.12 - Collaboration / communication

We will improve the working relationship and the Council's contact centrally with schools, ensuring better communication and collaboration between the children and education services also. The Education Safeguarding and Welfare Team has been a significant step in the right direction to that end.

## Work stream 3 – Training and Policies

### **What has been achieved thus far?**

#### 3.1 - Safeguarding Training and Policies

Since the offender's arrest, significant progress has been made to strengthen safeguarding arrangements. The Corporate Safeguarding Policy has been reviewed and updated to reflect changes in legislation and national guidance, ensuring that safeguarding principles are embedded across all departments. In addition, amended training packs have been provided to all staff, including mandatory modules on child protection, safeguarding adults, domestic abuse and preventing modern slavery. These arrangements are overseen by the Safeguarding Strategic Panel and the Operational Group, providing assurance that safeguarding standards are maintained and improved continually, and by now all Council Departments report on levels of completion of mandatory training at their performance challenge and support meetings.

In order to ensure that safeguarding principles have been embedded across the Council, we have established an internal audit process to assess the awareness levels among the workforce. This audit includes staff surveys, sample interviews and checking compliance with mandatory training. The results will be analysed to identify gaps in knowledge and priorities for further training. In addition, the audit will measure the effectiveness of existing policies and provide evidence of continuous improvement. This work is an essential part of our commitment to safeguarding, ensuring that all members of the workforce understand their responsibilities and act promptly to protect children and adults.

As well as providing amended training packs, we have established a continuous review process to ensure that safeguarding training in schools is current and reflects best practices. This includes monitoring compliance, analysing data on completing training, and reviewing the content of modules regularly to respond to legislative changes or national recommendations. Feedback from schools and partners is gathered systematically to improve the quality and relevance of the training. This process will ensure that all members of staff have the necessary information and skills to protect children effectively.

#### 3.2 - Investigation into arrangements of dealing with requests under the Freedom of Information Act

As a result of the exceptional number of freedom of information requests received as a result of this exceptional case (mainly from the press) we did not manage to answer everything within the usual timescales. All these requests needed to be considered in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act. This meant reviewing the information and consider whether exceptions needed to be implemented to ensure e.g. that individuals' personal data or child protection matters were released inappropriately. We answered every request and either released the information, if appropriate to do so, or implemented an appropriate statutory exception.

In order to ensure transparency and compliance, a voluntary audit was carried out by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) on our response arrangements to FOI requests. The Audit Report has now been received and it noted '*there is a reasonable level of assurance that processes and procedures are in place and are delivering FOI compliance. The audit has identified some scope for improvement in existing arrangements to reduce the risk of non-compliance with the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)*'. This level of assurance scores second of 4 tiers of assurance levels (High, Reasonable, Limited, Very Limited).

We have adopted an action plan to respond to its recommendations, including:

- Strengthening monitoring processes to ensure responses are provided within deadlines.
- Review and refine the internal structures on using exemptions.
- Provide additional training for staff on the FOI principles and data protection.

Progress will be monitored regularly and reported to the Strategic Panel and Scrutiny Committee to ensure continuous improvement.

### **What else needs to be done to meet the objectives?**

#### **3.3 - Whistleblowing Policy and Training**

Significant work has been carried out to review and strengthen the Whistleblowing Policy and associated training arrangements. A new version of the policy has now been created by the task group, with input from the Legal Service, Human Resources and Internal Audit. The next steps include consulting with the unions, submitting to the Corporate Management Team, and then submitting to the Full Council for final approval. After that, an awareness raising programme will be implemented, including mandatory training for managers and a new e-learning module for staff. In addition, there is ongoing work to assess the benefit of commissioning a specialist external company to support the Council to implement the policy. The work programme also includes a plan to commission a new recording and monitoring system to implement the policy, ensuring transparency and consistency. These arrangements will strengthen an open and safe culture within which staff can raise concerns without fear, reflecting recommendations identified in the previous reports.

As this is a Council policy in its capacity as an employer, operating under staff terms and conditions of employment, we will also ensure that our arrangements for reporting concerns by Members are clear and robust and that they offer a safe and confidential route. We will also ensure that these systems have a prominent place in our induction and training programme for Members so that everyone understands how and when to use them.

#### **3.4 - Grooming Training**

Further to part 1.7 of this plan which states that Safeguarding training has been adapted to include a part on grooming, we will be providing a grooming training programme to staff in the Children and Education Departments including administrative and facilities staff in schools, and relevant elected members, on how sex offenders operate and use grooming.

We will work with partners to develop an appropriate package as training packs that are already available for purchase do not meet the requirements of Our Bravery Brought Justice as they are.

#### **3.4 - Supervision**

The 'Our Bravery Brought Justice' report identified that the Welsh Government would need to review Governance arrangements in schools in Wales including ensuring that Designated Safeguarding Persons (DSPs) and their deputies receive external supervision from qualified Social Workers. The Safeguarding and Welfare Team at the Education Department currently provides information, advice and support to the DSP in schools across Gwynedd and this arrangement is unique to the county with the Team Manager in ongoing contact with the Gwynedd child protection team. With almost one hundred Designated Safeguarding Persons in schools (not including the deputy of DSPs), additional resources will need to be secured to effectively implement this recommendation – this will be

discussed further at a regional and national level first to ensure understanding and joint response to this expectation.

## Work Stream 4 - School Governance

### **What has been achieved thus far?**

#### **4.1 Support Gwynedd School Governors**

The Education system as it currently exists places responsibility on Governing Bodies (as a separate entity to local Government Education Departments) to be responsible for every individual school. These Bodies are a combination of Governors representing various stakeholders in schools and they are voluntary roles.

In order to support Governors to fulfil their role, arrangements are in place to provide training and support. These arrangements often stem from national guidelines and the training has been provided regionally.

We have already provided the following to support Governors:

- Ensure that all governing body members have a valid DBS.
- Safeguarding training for all school governors.
- Provide safeguarding training specifically for Chairs and DSPs on governing bodies.
- Mandatory training programme for governors is in place across the county.
- Continuous advice and support is available for governing bodies via the Assistant Education Support Officer.
- Support and guidance for clerks to governors, including stepping in directly to clerk at Ysgol Friars to stabilise the arrangements.
- We have published and shared a new handbook for governors, ensuring consistency and clear standards across schools.

The national system places significant burden and responsibilities on Governing Bodies and very often fulfilling the role is extremely challenging, particularly as it is on a voluntary basis for a few hours every now and then. Their duties and responsibilities are wide-ranging and challenging including finance, staffing, buildings, standard of education matters etc. Governors also face, and embrace, the challenge of promoting pupils to be full and healthy citizens, promote propriety and fairness towards everyone, including introducing the new Relationships and Sexuality Education Code successfully.

We believe that a national discussion is needed to the suitability of the current system and the burden placed on Governors, and we have written to Welsh Government asking them to consider this, noting our various frustrations with the existing system.

Since then, Welsh Government has begun a review of Governance arrangements in schools.

#### **4.2 Review of the response to a report by an Independent Complaints Panel in 2019**

In 2019 an Independent Complaints Panel was held in accordance with the complaints procedure in schools, to consider complaints against the Governing Body of Ysgol Friars.

In response, an Independent Investigation was held into the way the recommendations in the Independent Complaints Panel's Report were responded to. The main purpose of this commission was to assess whether the School, Governing Body and Council responded adequately and appropriately to the findings of the Complaints Panel Report.

This work was completed in Spring and the recommendations submitted by the investigator have been transferred to the Response Board work programme

## **What else needs to be delivered in order to meet our objectives?**

### **4.3 Responding to and implementing any amendments to school governance arrangements**

We are eagerly awaiting the result of Welsh Government's review to governance arrangements in schools, but in the meantime, we need to ensure that we offer the best possible training and support to governors in all our schools to deliver their challenging and wide-ranging duties, therefore, we will amend our current arrangements in order to try to ensure that these volunteers feel confident to fulfil their role and receive the appropriate support.

What we already intend to implement to support them includes developing and providing further guidance to clerks on prioritising matters, timetabling and content of governors' papers; review the range of existing training and identify alternative or more flexible ways of introducing them to ensure that all governors have timely access; and consider creating a pool of full-time clerks, who would serve the schools as and when necessary and provide independent and professional support, strengthening governance across the county.

## **Work Stream 5 - Restrictive Practices**

### **What has been achieved thus far?**

#### **5.1 Restrictive practices and training**

In this case, the offender was operating contrary to schools policy regarding filming incidents where restrictive practices were being used. The Local Authority has a model policy for schools and they are expected to adopt this policy. The individual school reasonable force policy is checked in quality visits by the Safeguarding Team and training is also provided to Schools by the inclusion service. An additional Safeguarding and Wellbeing Officer was recently appointed to the Team in order to be able to carry out annual quality visits.

### **What else needs to be delivered in order to meet our objectives?**

#### **5.2 Standardise restrictive practices and training**

The authority will continue to review the content of the policy to reflect what the Government will publish as a supplement and will communicate any relevant change to the schools and governing bodies.

Currently, there are two types of training on the use of restrictive practices offered by different services and work is underway to reconcile these to ensure a consistent approach across our services. This will take place alongside work to improve staff and learners' understanding of the use of Restrictive Practices.

The authority will establish a briefing and commission an external company to evaluate the current policy, training arrangements, school support, pupil support, and compliance monitoring methods. An Education/Safeguarding/ALN Working Group has been established to lead and facilitate the implementation that will result from this evaluation.

## **Work Stream 6 - Crisis Planning and Crisis Response**

### **What has been achieved thus far?**

#### **6.1 Responding to an emergency in schools**

Training on dealing with emergency situations was provided to all Gwynedd Schools in 2024, arranged by the North Wales Emergency Planning Partnership for situations such as fire, accident or stabbing.

However, in this case, the emergency was a safeguarding emergency which involved the Site Manager, the Head, namely the individual who would usually take control of an emergency situation in the school.

Short-term guidelines have been shared with schools and governors, reminding them of the arrangements and to reiterate messages that in a case of an emergency they should phone 999 immediately. However, we plan to put more firm arrangements in place so that everyone is aware of their responsibility in situations like these.

### **What else needs to be delivered in order to meet our objectives?**

#### **6.2 Review corporate emergency planning arrangements**

Emergency response plans are based on the site manager managing the situation - taking control and directing others in order to safeguard children / staff / public. We need to revise these procedures for situations in which the site manager (or the Head himself as in this case) is the one causing the risk / emergency.

In order to strengthen our ability to respond effectively to safeguarding emergencies, the new work streams will focus on creating robust arrangements for planning, co-ordinating and taking action in emergency situations. This will include developing clear protocols to respond to this in a safeguarding emergency in order to protect victims, safeguard evidence and control the alleged offender.

This could, of course, be relevant to sites more widely than schools, such as care homes or leisure centres and it is essential that emergency plans across the Council respond to this.

## Work stream 7 – Supporting and stabilising Ysgol Friars

### **What has been achieved thus far?**

#### 7.1 - School Support Plan

Following the offender's arrest on 6 September, immediate and responsive support was provided to the school, and a School Support Plan was adopted which included external critical guidance. From October 2023 until March 2024, Sarah Sutton was appointed as a critical friend to the Acting Head, whilst Margaret Davies was appointed in order to support the Welfare Deputy Head.

In order to support the school and the welfare of staff throughout this challenging time, the Human Resources Advisers Team Leader and Assistant Head of the Education Department with responsibility for supporting the secondary sector provided supervision and operational support.

In addition, a teacher with significant experience in inclusion who until recently worked in another Secondary School within the County offers further support for between three and four days a week.

Since September 2023, the Education Department has been providing continual support and resources to the School, which includes the contribution and expertise of all staff of the Education Department, ensuring stability and continuous support for the recovery of Ysgol Friars. Support was provided to review their safeguarding policies and new policies have been adopted by the school.

Officers from the Education Department have been meeting Union representatives regularly as well, taking the opportunity to listen to concerns and try to share timely information with them.

#### 7.2 - Amend the Governing Body

Following the offender's sentencing in May 2024, the Council reviewed the Authority's membership on the Governing Body including appointing four Members on behalf of the Authority.

In addition, other members left and by now 14 out of the 19 members of the Governing Body are new to their roles with a new Chair appointed.

Ongoing support is given by Officers of the Education Department in order to train and offer practical support to the new governors of the School.

The Authority now provides clerking support to the Governing Body.

#### 7.3 - Changes to the Senior Leadership Team

The School's Senior Leadership Team has seen substantial changes since the offender's arrest. As well as the imprisonment of the offender, other members of the Senior Leadership Team have left their roles and an entirely new Team is now in place.

The responsibilities of the Designated Safeguarding Officer who was part of the Senior Leadership Team have also been transferred to a different member of staff.

The School received supervision from Margaret Davies, who is an experienced headteacher and, at the time, a headteacher of a school in another county.

#### 7.4 - Appointment of Interim Head

After significant recruitment challenges, Lynne Hardcastle was appointed as acting Head to provide leadership in the period between November and the end of December 2024, initially.

Margaret Davies was appointed Head of the school for 4 terms from Easter 2025 until August 2026. The extended period in the role will be an opportunity to stabilise the school and review the operational arrangements thoroughly. It will also give an opportunity to support staff for an extended period and will give faith to the parents that the school is under new, experienced leadership with a strong background in safeguarding.

### **What else needs to be delivered in order to meet our objectives?**

#### **7.5 - Appointment of a new Permanent Head**

Until now, the Governors have not been able to appoint a new Permanent Head for the School which is why the temporary arrangements have been put in place. The appointment of Margaret Davies until the end of the Summer Term 2026 will give the school an opportunity to stabilise and start a new chapter.

The school will start a recruitment process in order to appoint a new permanent Head early in 2026.

#### **7.6 - Commission to review operational arrangements at the school**

As the new Governing Body establishes itself, and as the interim Head has the opportunity to review all the school's arrangements, we as a Council will support them to undertake a piece of work to compare Ysgol Friars' operational arrangements with the operational arrangements in the rest of the county's schools, trying to identify differences in order to consider whether there are any operational changes that need to be made.

This work is intended to be accomplished jointly between the new Governing Body and the Education Department.

## 7. Further Investigations

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*To be completed once further investigations have been completed in January 2026.*

In due course, we will receive the findings of the above-mentioned investigations and we will need to act on the various findings and recommendations. What will be expected of us will depend on those findings and recommendations and therefore we will need to review this part of this Response Plan after receiving the reports in question.

We have stated clearly from the beginning that we will embrace all the recommendations and every investigation and will implement them in full and without delay, and it is appropriate for us to restate this here.

## 8. Ownership and governance arrangements of the Plan

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It is the Council's Cabinet that has commissioned this Response Plan.

The Response Plan was formally adopted by the Cabinet on 21 January 2025 following which a specific Response Board was established in order to co-ordinate and ensure appropriate and timely progress. Several external bodies were invited to be a part of the Board and an independent Chair was appointed and the Response Board met for the first time in March 2025.

The Response Board is chaired by Professor Sally Holland, former Children's Commissioner, who has the relevant background and experience to facilitate challenging the delivery and implementation. There are also a number of observers on the Response Board including Estyn, Care Inspectorate Wales, Welsh Government, North Wales Safeguarding Board and the Children's Commissioner.

The Chair of the Response Board reports to the Cabinet every quarter and to be confirmed in the Terms of Reference referred to above.

There is a role for the Governance and Audit Committee, the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee and the Care Scrutiny Committee also to scrutinise progress and delivery (as well as completing the Scrutiny Investigation noted in part 2.7).

The content of this Plan will need to be reviewed regularly and as the situation develops. This is a live plan, and it is unavoidable that it will change as we move from the investigation and learning phase to the recovery phase.

It is unavoidable that progress will be difficult to measure as many matters will be open to personal opinion. One measure will be completing all the individual steps identified in the Plan's Work Streams and a comprehensive and detailed action plan exists to track them which has over 200 tasks and actions to deliver the objectives of this plan. The Board has also agreed a series of impact measures, including regular monitoring of young people's, parents and staff views on the effectiveness of safeguarding in schools. However, it must be acknowledged that delivering all of this will be a long-term process and we will commit to doing so, come what may.

## 9. Communication plan

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Before publishing Our Bravery Brought Justice in November 2025, there were restrictions on the Council's ability to fully communicate information so as not to interfere with the work of the independent reviewers. Following the publication of the report, the Council is now able to share much more information about the work to adapt and strengthen our arrangements in response to the findings and recommendations. However, it is important to note that we must continue to tread carefully with matters that relate to individual cases involving children and/or adults, or that are Human Resources issues.

The original Communication Plan – which included a series of sub-plans to communicate information to key stakeholders – has been completed. Work has now begun to create a new Communication Plan that will be based on the workstreams in the revised Response Plan.

In addition, a web page has been established so that any statements and relevant information are kept in one place – [www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/ymatebidroseddu](http://www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/ymatebidroseddu)