

EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL 05/02/2026

Attendance:

Councillors:

Ioan Thomas (Chair)

Elin Walker Jones (Vice-chair)

Craig ab Iago, Menna Baines, Beca Brown, Stephen Churchman, Robert Glyn Daniels, Dafydd Owen Davies, Elwyn Edwards, Elfed Wyn ap Elwyn, Alan Jones Evans, Gwilym Evans, Dylan Fernley, Delyth Lloyd Griffiths, Annwen Hughes, Louise Hughes, R. Medwyn Hughes, Elin Hywel, Nia Wyn Jeffreys, Anne Lloyd Jones, Berwyn Parry Jones, Dawn Lynne Jones, Dewi Jones, Elwyn Jones, Gwilym Jones, Gareth Tudor Jones, Huw Wyn Jones, June Jones, Eryl Jones-Williams, Cai Larsen, Beth Lawton, Dafydd Meurig, Dilwyn Morgan, Dewi Owen, Edgar Wyn Owen, Gwynfor Owen, Llio Elenid Owen, Gareth Coj Parry, Geraint Parry, John Pughe, Rheinallt Puw, Arwyn Herald Roberts, Beca Roberts, Elfed P Roberts, Gareth A Roberts, John Pughe Roberts, Meryl Roberts, Richard Glyn Roberts, Huw Llwyd Rowlands, Paul Rowlinson, Angela Russeull, Dyfrig Siencyn, Peter Thomas, Menna Trenholme, Rhys Tudur, Hefin Underwood, Einir Wyn Williams, Elfed Williams, Gareth Williams, Gruffydd Williams and Sian Williams.

Officers:

Dafydd Gibbard (Chief Executive), Dewi Morgan (Head of Finance), Iwan Evans (Monitoring Officer), Dylan Owen (Corporate Director), Catrin Thomas (Corporate Director), Gwern ap Rhisiart (Head of Education), Ian Jones (Head of Corporate Services), Aled Gibbard (Interim Head of Children's Department), Nia Gridale (Legal Service Manager), Sion Huws (Propriety and Elections Manager), Ffion Mai Jones (Senior Operational Officer), Alison Halliday (Assistant Head of Schools Support), Llion Williams (Quality Lead for Safeguarding and Well-being), Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Service Manager) and Rhodri Jones (Democracy Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Sasha Williams, John Brynmor Hughes, Jina Gwyrfaï, Gwion Emyr, Wendy Cleaver and Anwen Davies.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

3. THE CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

It was confirmed that this extraordinary meeting of the Full Council had been convened by the Chair in accordance with paragraph 4.12.1(b) of the Council's Constitution, to discuss the 'Response Plan to the Our Bravery Brought Justice report'. It was highlighted that an additional item had been programmed as an exception to the programme, namely 'Re-appointment of an Independent Member to the Standards Committee'. It was reported that a discussion on the Response Plan would be held first because of its importance, with the Members' permission.

Condolences were extended to the families of the late John Wynne Meredith, former councillor of Garth (Bangor) and Alwyn Elis Roberts, former Cyngor Gwynedd secretary following their recent bereavements. Condolences were expressed to everyone within

the County's communities who had recently lost loved ones. The Council stood in silence as a mark of respect and remembrance.

It was noted that several Council members had been ill recently, and they were wished a speedy recovery.

The following were congratulated:

- Councillor Elfed Wyn ap Elwyn and his wife, Anwen, on the recent birth of their daughter, Nanw Eluned.
- Councillor Craig ab Iago on winning an Enablement UK 2025 Award.
- Elfyn Evans on the achievement of coming second in the first World Rally Championship rally in Monte Carlo recently. He was wished well for the championship this year.
- Bangor City Football Club 1876 and Caernarfon Town Football Club on reaching the semi-final round of the Welsh Cup.
- Nick Thomas from Talysarn on winning a gold medal in the World Para-Archery Championship.

4. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

5. RE-APPOINTMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT MEMBER TO THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report noting that Mr Hywel Eifion Jones's term had come to an end but the Standards Committees Regulations (Wales) 2001 allowed independent members to be re-appointed for an additional term, not being longer than four years, as requested in the report.

It was reported that Mr Hywel Eifion Jones had been a member of the Standards Committee since 2019 and he had served as the Chair of the Committee since 2023. It was confirmed that his first term as a Committee Member had ended in July 2025 and that the vacant seat had not been filled in the meantime. It was assured that he could be re-appointed in accordance with the above Regulations, for a second membership term. It was highlighted that there was a gap in his membership, but legal advice had agreed that it was appropriate for him to be re-elected.

Many expressions of support were received from the Members, as Mr Hywel Eifion Jones had been a very hard-working Member of the Standards Committee. He was thanked for his thorough, knowledgeable, valuable and objective work throughout his first term.

RESOLVED to re-appoint Hywel Eifion Jones as an independent member of the Standards Committee to serve for a further term of four years from 05 February 2026.

6. RESPONSE PLAN TO THE OUR BRAVERY BROUGHT JUSTICE REPORT

This item was submitted by the Chair noting the following main points:

It was acknowledged that the 'Our Bravery Brought Justice' report was a difficult and emotional document to read and that it highlighted a number of missed opportunities by many bodies, including Cyngor Gwynedd, to try to stop Neil Foden: former Ysgol Friars Headteacher. The sincere apologies given to the victims were reiterated and emphasis was given on the responsibility of ensuring that everything was done to ensure that nobody suffered in the same way again.

THE COUNCIL Thursday, 5 February 2026

It was reported that significant scrutiny work had been undertaken on the Response Plan during January 2026. It was elaborated that 12 hours had been spent scrutinising this matter between the Care Scrutiny Committee (13 January 2026), the Governance and Audit Committee (15 January 2026) and the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee (19 January 2026). It was highlighted that the committees' observations had been included as part of the documentation for this meeting.

Members were taken through the order of the meeting, noting that priority was given to those Members who had not already had the opportunity to submit observations in the committees above, to ensure that all Members had an opportunity to provide input. It was explained, in fairness to everyone, that Members should refrain from repeating the same matters raised in the meetings above, and also note which of the 7 themes of the Response Plan they were referring to. Members were reminded of the usual procedure to try not to take more than 5 minutes of the meeting's time to contribute to the discussion.

It was emphasised that the Members and officers had no right to discuss any employment matters or possible investigations, as they were matters that the employer must address in accordance with the statutory employment rights and constitution. They were reminded that the Monitoring Officer had provided and circulated a briefing note to the members advising them on this matter.

It was explained that the observations made during the discussion would be submitted to the Cabinet, as well as the observations of the Scrutiny Committees and the Governance and Audit Committee, should the observations receive the Members' approval at the end of the discussion on this item.

The report was submitted by the Council Leader. The following main matters were emphasised:

A sincere apology was offered to the victims and all those affected by the heinous offences committed that had led to requiring this report. Furthermore, apologies were given that the voice of the children had not been heard, emphasising that acting to ensure change was the greatest tribute the Council could achieve.

It was confirmed that this Response Plan tried to ensure that these types of failures highlighted in the Review did not happen again. Input was welcomed by all Council members, noting that a healthy discussion and challenge was essential to the Council's success.

It was highlighted that the Response Plan was a live and public document, confirming that the minutes of the Response Plan Programme Board meetings would also be public. It was noted that transparency was necessary to restore confidence amongst the public, staff and Members.

The Members were thanked for their willingness to discuss this difficult matter in a sensitive and professional manner, as well as Members' preparedness to improve safeguarding arrangements to reduce the risk that children suffered in the same manner again. They were reminded that safeguarding and protecting children from harm was everyone's responsibility. It was noted that real and timely progress in this vital field can only be made by working with Members, partners and stakeholders.

Professor Sally Holland was also thanked for her specialist guidance in her role as Chair of the Response Plan Programme Board and to many Council Departments who had made progress to date, for their cross-departmental collaborative work to improve child safeguarding arrangements within Gwynedd schools.

It was emphasised that no one could make this change alone; whether a service, a Department, a political group or an individual. The need to work together across Council Departments and committees and political differences was reported, to see real change, hold the Council accountable and create a safer future for the children and young people of Gwynedd.

It was acknowledged that the Response Plan did not include all the answers, and the Scrutiny Committees and the Governance and Audit Committee were thanked for their valuable and constructive input. It was confirmed that the Council was on the right track, and welcomed the Members' constructive criticisms, suggestions and opinions to further strengthen the Response Plan.

A presentation was given by the Chief Executive. Attention was drawn to the following main points:

He agreed with the Leader and the Chair that this discussion was an important step to restore, improve and ensure that every action was implemented to respond effectively to the Report.

They were reminded that the Council's original Response Plan had been published before the publication of the 'Our Bravery Brought Justice' report. The need for the document to be live was acknowledged, in order to be able to respond to information that emerged as the Report was published, as well as fully adapting the plan to address the information included in it. It was confirmed that this second version of the Response Plan was the result of that work, which was being discussed in this meeting. Attention was drawn to the fact that many organisations had already considered the Response Plan, as well as the Committees already acknowledged, including the Response Plan Programme Board, the Children's Commissioner and the Safeguarding Board. It was explained that any observations submitted during the discussion on this item would be acknowledged and the live document would be adapted before being submitted to the Cabinet for further consideration and approval. It was explained that some amendments had already been made to the document following considerations and observations that had been submitted from the discussion that has already taken place.

It was reported that the Response Plan had been split into seven main work streams as follows:

1. **Voice of the Child and Supporting Victims** (Theme Leader: Gwern ap Rhisiart – Head of Education Department). This was the main theme raised in the Report. It was confirmed that there were four aims within this theme:
 - i. 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.
 - ii. Ensure that children are listened to, and that they are believed and taken seriously.
 - iii. Give a voice to children and young people in processes that have been designed to keep them safe.
 - iv. Do everything within our ability to support the victims and survivors and establish a caring relationship with them.
2. **Managing allegations and concerns about adults working with children** (Theme Leader: Dylan Owen – Corporate Director). The main aim of the theme was confirmed as follows:
 - i. Ensure that our safeguarding arrangements are robust and of the best possible standard.
 - ii. Protect children by ensuring that concerns are taken seriously and acted upon quickly.

- iii. Ensure that Part 5 arrangements support a consistent and robust multi-agency response to allegations and concerns about adults working with children.
- 3. **Training and Policies** (Theme Leader: Ian Jones – Head of Corporate Services Department). The main aim of the theme was confirmed as follows:
 - i. Ensure that training packs are appropriate and that staff have received training suitable to their roles.
 - ii. Do everything within our ability to ensure that the county's schools adopt and implement policies.
 - iii. Ensure that staff are trained to "think the unthinkable" and understand that "it could happen here".
- 4. **School Governance** (Theme Leader: Alison Halliday – Assistant Head of School Support). The main aim of the theme was confirmed as follows:
 - i. Offer the best possible support to our school Governors to equip them to exercise their roles.
 - ii. Ensure that school governors understand their roles and responsibilities to keep children safe.
 - iii. Ensure that systems are in place which measure the wider culture of schools.
- 5. **Reasonable Force** (Theme Leader: Llion Williams – Safeguarding and Well-being Quality Lead). The main aim of the theme was confirmed as follows:
 - i. Do everything possible to ensure that all schools implement the practices of the use of reasonable force appropriately.
- 6. **Emergency Planning** (Theme Leader: Catrin Love – Assistant Head of Corporate Support). The main aim of the theme was confirmed as follows:
 - i. Ensure there are appropriate arrangements for planning and responding to crises and that all staff know how to respond in a safeguarding emergency situation.
- 7. **Supporting and Stabilising Ysgol Friars** (Theme Leader: Margaret Davies – Ysgol Friars Headteacher). The main aim of the theme was confirmed as follows:
 - i. 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.

Margaret Davies was congratulated on her appointment as the school's permanent Headteacher following a period as the interim Headteacher recently. It was trusted that this appointment would ensure stability for the school in the future.

The Response Plan's work programme was shared for transparency. The Members were reminded that 26 recommendations derived from the Report, but it was explained that 74 work streams were operational on the work programme, as well as the delivery timescales and lead individuals, to ensure an effective response to the Review.

The Chairs of the committees that had already considered the Response Plan were invited to summarise the observations submitted within their meetings.

The following observations were received from the Chair of the Care Scrutiny Committee, from the main considerations of the meeting held on 13 January 2026:

Thanks were given for the opportunity to share the Committee's observations, thanking the Chair for conducting this meeting, following a request from the Committee Members for a Full Council meeting to ensure that every Member had an opportunity to share observations to develop the best possible Plan.

The Committee's decisions and recommendations were summarised as follows, confirming that the Committee would continuously monitor their development:

1. To note the work Programme
2. To request a progress report in 6 months on the work programme, including information on the whistleblowing policy and its implementation
3. To request a report on securing a Child Friendly County status and becoming a Trauma-Informed Council.
4. To ask the Cabinet to consider:
 - Adding the name of an external female contact to the poster on sharing information about concerns and ensure contact details are available on school websites and the Council website.
 - Addressing the voice of the family as well as the voice of the child in work stream 1.
 - Amending the text under the heading '2.3 – Estyn inspection of the Council's Education Department' on page 18 of the Response Plan to include a sentence reflecting the context that, despite the commendation by Estyn, a school headteacher was arrested a few months later.
 - Ensuring that grooming training is available to all who need it.
 - Providing external specialist safeguarding training for members and governors.
 - Adding the "well-being of children and young people" to the description of work stream 7 – Supporting and Stabilising Ysgol Friars.
 - Corresponding with the Welsh Government to express concern about the challenges and risks surrounding the role of school governors.

The following observations were received from the Chair of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee, from the main considerations of the meeting held on 19 January 2026:

He expressed pride in the Committee's recommendations, noting that they were attempting to consider what type of organisation Cyngor Gwynedd was when things went wrong and challenging situations arose.

A summary of the Committee's decisions was shared for the following main themes:

- Voice of the Child and Supporting Victims – It was emphasised that these recommendations confirmed that listening to the voice of the child and victims was not just a symbolic practice and that their voice permeated through the investigation process until decisions were made, even when what was said was uncomfortable and went against organisational aspects. It was reported that there was a need to change processes and change the collective mindset.
- Clarity, Consistency and Accountability in response to concerns – It was believed that a lack of assertiveness and delay in responding to safeguarding concerns created a real risk to children. It was noted that the committee's recommendations asked for clear and specific pathways when making decisions and escalating concerns. He elaborated that they emphasised the need to recognise patterns appearing over time and prevent privatising matters by considering them as individual matters rather than systemic ones.
- Ensure training that changes visual behaviour, not ensuring superficial compliance – It was emphasised that the Committee was not requesting more training to tick boxes, and they should be used to give staff the confidence to use professional judgement, so that they identified grooming, understood boundaries and acted appropriately when safeguarding risks were complex or related to influential people within the employment chain. It was confirmed that it was a matter of quality, depth and ethics to provide this key training. It was explained that it was

not the number or length of training sessions that were important, but the output seen from them.

- Governance that challenged, not avoiding conflict – Attention was drawn to a clear emphasis on the recommendations to tighten the role of Governors, school Leaders and scrutiny structures to ask difficult questions such as; 'Why was this decision made? What was known at the time? What was not seen or heard?'. It was explained that effective governance was about curiosity and bravery, highlighting that it was not always a comfortable responsibility.
- Call for a culture that can learn from its failures – It was reported that this was one of the most important themes raised within the Committee's discussions. It was explained that the Recommendations clearly highlighted the need for a culture where people felt safe to share concerns and also challenge and identify failures without having to face personal consequences. It was warned that no Response Plan would lead to a permanent change should this cultural change not happen.

It was reported that the Committee's recommendations did not blame individuals, instead it tried to ensure accountability, create a system where failures were acknowledged, explored and used to make things better.

It was emphasised that the response to the Report was not an individual event. It was a journey where we would need to continuously measure progress and show a willingness to adapt when things did not work as they should.

It was explained that the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee regularly revisited these matters, confirming that this was to test whether lessons had been learned and that change was visible in real life, not to reopen old wounds. It was elaborated that success was measured based on whether children, staff, parents and governors felt that the Council's culture had changed.

It was noted that the Committee's decisions can be seen in full in this meeting's papers, the minutes of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee's meeting and on the Council's website.

The following observations were received from the Chair of the Governance and Audit Committee, from the main considerations of the meeting held on 15 January 2026:

It was reported that the Committee's main duty regarding the Report was to consider that the Response Plan was appropriate and comprehensive, that it ensured that the main priorities were being implemented and provided advice when dealing with dependencies. The following main considerations were confirmed:

- The report was lengthy and too wordy at times. However, praise was expressed to those who had coordinated the work as it was a professional and substantial document.
- They welcomed that the Response Plan was being discussed at several forums.
- They agreed that a simple and definite summary or front cover of the main action points was needed.
- The need to safeguard children in schools was accepted, but the need to safeguard children in every situation was emphasised.
- With regard to the grooming training in part 3.4 of Work Stream 3, the need to revise the emphasis of the training and its title to include acknowledgement of grooming prevention was noted.
- They welcomed the detail of the Response Plan of what was going to happen, but emphasised the need to reflect on what had happened. They stressed the need to declare staff failures on every level and conduct discussions with those who were integral to the failures. They highlighted the need to ensure that a process had been followed to understand the context of what had gone wrong.

- In the context of 'missed opportunities' and 'professional duty', it was accepted that it was not possible to discuss specific cases. However, they reported the need to ensure that disciplinary arrangements were in place, as well as a timetable for the disciplinary process and the ways of reporting on the action, in fairness to the affected families.
- It was welcomed that the plan put emphasis on safeguarding and whistleblowing arrangements. It was emphasised that it was essential for the Council to be at its best within these fields. The reviews to the policies were welcomed, emphasising the need for an update on that work, as well as a timetable and how they were being adopted.
- Emphasis was placed on the need for short, accurate and effective processes to embed into the culture's procedures, ensuring that they did not respond to tick-box practices.
- They were pleased that arrangements with the Police and the Health Board were being tightened.
- The Committee wished to receive regular updates on the steps that had been implemented or being considered as a suitable and appropriate response to the situation.

It was elaborated that the Committee's discussions included observations that there were many references to Estyn. Although the review, conducted in June 2023, had been misleading and defective regarding safeguarding arrangements, and there was no clear acknowledgement of those deficiencies in the report, it was agreed that the information could be added into the final report that would be presented to the Cabinet. The Head of Education added that he would raise the matter with Estyn and highlight that the Governance and Audit Committee required acknowledgement from Estyn that their review had been misleading. This would restore the public's confidence in future Estyn reports.

It was confirmed that the Committee's decisions at the end of the discussion were as follows:

- To accept the detail of the Response Plan
- To thank the Officers for their work and welcome that the Response Plan was being discussed at several forums
- That a simple and definite summary/front cover of the main action points was needed
- That the Committee receives regular updates on the actions that have been taken or are being considered as a suitable and appropriate response to the situation
- A request by the Committee for Estyn to acknowledge the weaknesses of their report on the Council's safeguarding arrangements, June 2023
- That the Whistleblowing Arrangements and Safeguarding Arrangements need to be among the best
 - welcome the reviews to these policies
 - need an update on the work, timetable and manner in which they are adopted

The Chairs were thanked for summarising their meetings' discussions. It was explained that the request for this meeting came from observations made by the Leader of the Independent Group during the Care Scrutiny Committee's meeting. She was asked to formally open the discussion, where the following observations were shared:

Everyone who had contributed to the discussions of this Response Plan at every meeting held to date was thanked. The children and victims were thanked for their bravery.

Disappointment was expressed that Jan Pickles, Chair of the Child Practice Review, was not present to facilitate the discussion during this meeting.

Frustration was expressed that a public inquiry had not been conducted by the Welsh Government to this matter to date. It was emphasised that it would help the Council to ensure cultural and organisational change in light of the fact that 52 opportunities had been missed to stop this headteacher's offences.

The need to 'leave no stone unturned' was emphasised to ensure that such a situation never occurred again.

Observations already submitted were reiterated, asking to ensure that safeguarding and whistleblowing policies and procedures were correct and effective.

The Leader of the Independent Group was thanked for her observations, and other Members were given an opportunity to take part in the discussion, with priority given to those Members who were not members of the Committees discussed above.

Reference was made to an extraordinary meeting of the Full Council held on 18 August 2022 to discuss the Relationships and Sexuality Education Code, reminding Members of the lively nature of that meeting. It was noted that the Head of Corporate Services Department had noted that a Risk Assessment had been developed following that meeting, including meetings held in the Council's Chambers and virtually. It was asked why risk assessments had been developed for these situations, but that defective processes were underway to protect children within Gwynedd schools, such as appointing an offender to be the headteacher for two schools in Gwynedd.

In response to the observations above regarding risk assessments, the Cabinet Member for Education confirmed that risk assessments were drawn up by individual schools and their governors, with support from the Education Department. It was noted that every school in Gwynedd now received an annual visit from the Safeguarding and Well-being Team. Pride was expressed that this Team was expanding from 3 members to 4 members to ensure that it was possible to check every procedure for every school in the County annually.

In response to the observations above regarding the Relationships and Sexuality Education Code, the Cabinet Member for Education emphasised that what had happened at Ysgol Friars highlighted its importance. Members were reminded that the Code was intended to highlight healthy and acceptable relationships to children and young people, as well as what was completely unacceptable. The Report recommended increasing awareness of what grooming was, explaining that this work was underway to ensure that children and young people were able to identify where inappropriate actions happened to them, and to understand how they could report them. The Cabinet Member for Education added that it was important that every child and young person was aware of this education and that it was embedded into the curriculum in its entirety.

It was asked which disciplinary steps were underway or had been completed against all the Local Authority staff who had been highlighted within the Report as individuals who failed to respond to concerns. In response to the enquiries, the Chief Executive confirmed that it was not possible to comment on individual cases. However, he acknowledged that things had gone wrong and reported that every effort was being made to ensure that legal and employment arrangements were processed effectively and thoroughly.

Members were reminded that concerns about the offender had been raised in 2019 and that he had been appointed as the headteacher of a second school in Gwynedd after this. In response to an enquiry about how that appointment process had come to this decision, the Chief Executive confirmed that the wrong decision had been made

with this appointment and that detailed information was available in the Report. It was acknowledged that no further comments could be made at present, because of the legal situation that had already been explained.

Further attention was drawn to the fact that the Council had called on the Welsh Government to conduct a Public Inquiry into all the circumstances surrounding these offences as they had the statutory power to establish it. In response to this comment, the Council Leader confirmed that she had received a response to the call from the First Minister and this response would be circulated to the Members.

It was noted that the report confirmed that every school received an exemplar Schools Safeguarding Policy with the encouragement to complete minor amendments (such as the name of the school, the name of the designated person for safeguarding) and adopt it in accordance with the requirements of recognised guidelines and standards. It was elaborated that the governors held the responsibility for ensuring that effective safeguarding policies had been adopted and were reviewed at least once a year with support from the Education Department. In considering these matters, the need to ensure that these arrangements were monitored consistently was emphasised, as well as the fact that school headteachers and governors were accountable for the decisions made. Members were reminded that this documentation contained confidential information and therefore it could not be shared with all the governors, emphasising the need for the governors to hold the designated person for safeguarding accountable, as well as the school headteacher. It was highlighted that this was very difficult as it was not possible to challenge them without the full information. In response to an enquiry whether anyone within the Education Department was responsible for ensuring that these procedures had been followed, the Cabinet Member for Education confirmed that the Safeguarding and Well-being Team monitored that this work was being completed by every school in Gwynedd.

It was acknowledged that there was a delay with the Welsh Government's review on governance arrangements in schools, but it was noted that it was likely that the former Ysgol Friars headteacher had been using this as an excuse to not secure change in the past. It was emphasised that there had been no change to school governance arrangements for many years and that a change in this field was key. In response to the observations, the Cabinet Member for Education confirmed that the current governance arrangement was broken and changes had to be made. It was confirmed that one officer within the Education Department was working to support governors, noting that a second officer had recently been appointed. Members were reminded that our schools' governors were volunteers and they needed full support. It was considered that too much was being asked of governors, with too much pressure placed on those individuals who wished to contribute to their local community – like being a line manager to a school Headteacher. It was hoped that this review from the Welsh Government would enable new decisions on what was suitable and appropriate to be governors' responsibilities. An update was given on the fact that the Education Department had received an initial revised terms of reference as part of this review from the Welsh Government, noting that the Council had highlighted additional considerations for them to note. It was added that the Council was pushing to have a representative from Gwynedd working with the Government on this review to ensure that everyone's voice was heard.

Acknowledgement was welcomed that Reasonable Force (work stream 5 of the Report) had been identified as a theme where there was room for improvement. However, it was considered that the necessary actions should be more developed by now, highlighting that amendments to this field should have commenced around two and a half years ago, when the offender was arrested.

Attention was drawn to the fact that referral forms had been added to the Council website, with an e-mail being sent to all Gwynedd school headteachers. It was

considered that a single individual should not be the only one made aware of allegations, and it was possible to continuously monitor information. The need to circulate the referral forms to the designated person for safeguarding, governor chairs and vice-chairs, as well as every other relevant individual was considered. It was emphasised that everyone should be aware of how to access the form. It was hoped that the Response Plan would lead to organisational attitude change to ensure processes were in place for effective scrutiny and clear communication and to prevent the failures from happening again. In response to the observations, the Cabinet Member for Education confirmed that the referral form had been shared with everyone who had attended Safeguarding training and every designated person for safeguarding. It was added that posters had been distributed to schools highlighting who was the designated person for safeguarding to staff and pupils, as well as their contact details, asking anyone to contact the Department if they were aware of any school that did not display posters, to ensure that they could be given more posters. It was noted that ensuring that these posters were visible in the schools was part of the Safeguarding and Well-being Team's responsibility during their annual visits.

An observation was made that the rates of staff turnover and school exclusions should be monitored, noting that high rates could mean the need to start safeguarding processes enquiries.

Shame was expressed that 52 opportunities had been missed to catch this offender by responding to requests from pupils, staff and parents, and they asked for further details on how this had happened.

Details were given on Work Stream 1 (Voice of the Child and Supporting Victims), reiterating the Council's genuine apologies on several occasions. Further information was requested on how much money was being spent on therapy sessions, counselling and other assistance that the victims had identified that they needed. The need to ensure that enough money was being spent to provide this support, of the best quality, for the sake of the victims, was emphasised. They wished for assurance that money was being allocated to ensure that this support would be available in the Council's future budget continuously. It was explained that the Council Leader had already confirmed that Ysgol Friars had received grant funding of £500,000 and the Welsh Government had offered £600,000 to the Council to improve services. In response to the observations, it was acknowledged that it was difficult to confirm the data on the spending on support for victims currently. However, it was confirmed that an additional investment had been made to the counselling service at Ysgol Friars. It was explained that there was a high level of support at Ysgol Friars since before the offences had emerged, compared with other schools in the county, because a well-being hub had been established in the school with two additional counsellors to the provision offered in other schools. It was confirmed that the funding was sent to the Education Department and distributed further to the schools. It was elaborated that specialist support had been provided to victims and school staff. It was assured that any additional support that the school requested would be approved. It was reported that work would be done to gather the financial information and share it with Members.

Observations were shared on Work Stream 2 (Managing allegations and concerns about adults working with children), explaining that many Members had attended a special conference to discuss what had been learned following the Our Bravery Brought Justice report, which was arranged by RASASC (Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre) North Wales. It was confirmed that Jan Pickles had spoken there about trauma and a healthy and effective working culture and the connection between these subjects. It was reported that sexual abuse against a child caused clear trauma. It was noted that if a child was abused by a person in a position of trust, that added an additional layer of trauma. It was explained that the psychological foundations that a child relied upon to feel safe was destroyed as a result of their abuse, and even more so from an individual in a position of trust. It was confirmed that this was defined as

'Betrayal trauma' and could mean that a child grew up to be an adult who has trouble trusting people and seeing the world as an unsafe and volatile place. It was elaborated that 'Organisational betrayal trauma' was added to this trauma when organisations that were meant to protect a child turned a blind eye to what was happening. It was explained that this type of trauma made victims feel small, negligible and that they had no voice as organisations prioritised reputation, power and convenience over their safety and care. It was mentioned that this led to a re-wiring in the victims' nervous system to live life in a fight or flight mode because society would not protect them. Disappointment was expressed that Cyngor Gwynedd had played a part in this triple trauma – Abuse trauma, betrayal trauma and organisational betrayal trauma in the case of Ysgol Friars' brave victims.

It was elaborated that Part 5 of the Report related to the procedure that dealt with concerns about people in a position of trust. It was noted that there was insufficient understanding in this Council of the arrangements or the 'Suitability to Work with Children' criterion. It was explained that this caused obvious concern and that it also made the Council consider whether there were other people working with children in Gwynedd that should not be doing so. Praise was expressed that an audit of historical concerns was being extended in case concerns had fallen through the net. It was hoped that conducting this audit, as well as the Response Plan and other policies, was some of the Council's first steps in confidently ensuring that this would not happen again by adapting its culture. It was acknowledged that measuring cultural weaknesses was challenging, as it was not easy to measure its development, but the need for it to permeate from the top to all aspects of the Council's services was confirmed. They asked for assurance of visible and operational leadership to ensure a long-term change in the Council's culture. In response to the observations, the Chief Executive confirmed that he agreed with all the observations submitted and he acknowledged that there was work to do in this field. A commitment was made to ensure that the work developed within the Response Plan embedded in the Council's new culture. The Council Leader added that she would lead by example, reiterating that everyone had a role to ensure that the culture changed long-term for the future.

In a further response, the Deputy Council Leader provided an update that there had been many changes to Part 5 of the Report, relating to the procedure that dealt with concerns about people in a position of trust. It was confirmed that if any concerns were raised under this procedure, a social worker visited those children who were named in an allegation, to ensure that the voice of the child was heard. The Corporate Director added that it was not just one individual or organisation who made decisions on thresholds, noting that it was a multi-organisational matter. It was reported that many recommendations in the Report had been implemented, acknowledging that there was more work to be done. It was emphasised that work had been done when conducting an audit on historical concerns being extended, explaining that if a concern was raised more than once relating to one individual, the Council re-visited those referrals to ensure that no matter had fallen through the net.

In considering Work Stream 3 (Training and Policies), attention was drawn to the fact that the lack of taking minutes effectively was a consistent theme within the Report, because at least two meetings had been held regarding the offender with Senior Officers present where minutes had not been written, with other cases where minutes were absent or defective. A member asked what the policy was for taking minutes in these situations and whether specific thresholds needed to be met before the need for minutes arose. In response, the Corporate Director confirmed that thorough minutes were essential and every effort was being made to ensure that minutes met the Wales Professional Standards set by Social Care Wales, and specific standards were also set for occupational therapists. He reported that these standards set national expectations for all employees. Attention was also drawn to the Council's Quality Assurance policies where Senior Quality Officers and Team Leaders observed the work of the workforce to ensure that they reached those standards.

In response to the Report, it was assured that a specific Quality Assurance document was being developed for effective minute-taking for the Children and Supporting Families Department's social service, noting that this document would be scrutinised and considered by the Response Plan Programme Board and CIW (Care Inspectorate Wales), to ensure future appropriateness and suitability. It was acknowledged that observations had been made that minutes were not necessarily being kept centrally with easy access to them, reporting that a 'mosaic' system was being developed that would replace the WCCIS system by Autumn and a 'magic notes' system which converted verbal messages received by staff into an electronic record on the mosaic system. It was emphasised that training would be provided to all employees to ensure that they understood how to use this new system, which would also address what must be recorded and when.

In response to these observations from the Corporate Director, it was noted that complying with the professional record standards described had not saved the victims in the circumstances discussed. It was considered that it would be valuable to appoint an officer within the Council to ensure that the minutes written were high-quality and were monitored consistently. In response, the Deputy Council Leader gave thanks for this suggestion of appointing a new officer, agreeing that it would be an important function to add to the Council's processes.

There was concern that a lot of focus was given to the Council's procedures and not the Council's culture. It was highlighted that many of the missed opportunities stemmed from individual failures to comply with specific procedures rather than the procedures themselves being defective. It was noted that there were not enough plans in place to adapt this mindset to ensure that it was not possible for Council staff to fail to comply in future, by achieving cultural adjustments. It was asked what role Members had to scrutinise, research and monitor the Council's internal processes relating to staff members, whether there was a role at all. There was concern that if the Members had no role to play in such processes, whether Council staff scrutinised their own faults. It was emphasised that this should not happen and it was wondered to what extent this could happen following existing processes. In response to the considerations, the Chief Executive confirmed that staff disciplinary arrangements can be seen on the Council's website and he assured that no staff member had the ability or the power to assess their own blame as it was not appropriate or transparent to do so. The Members and public were assured that the Council was receiving guidance from an independent legal company that appropriate employment processes were underway for all individuals involved with this matter. It was reported that there was no political aspect to employment processes and therefore there was no prominent role for the Members in the development processes. However, in specific cases, cases could be presented to the Chief Officers Appointment Committee that includes Elected Members, to make the decision on employment matters, in accordance with the Council's Constitution.

General observations were submitted that reviewed this discussion. It was emphasised that all the matters discussed were ineffective alone, and that there was a need to intertwine all aspects to ensure that the Response Plan was effective in the future. It was explained that this was essential as the Report highlighted failures on many different aspects. It was considered that the most important question to consider was 'What would be different today should the same concerns be raised?'. The need to create a culture where staff were ready to challenge and leaders were ready to listen and act was emphasised. It was reported that it would be key for the right decisions to be made more quickly and always favouring safeguarding matters, especially in those situations where it was difficult to do so.

A request was made to Council Members and the press to start moving on from what had happened, and to no longer use photos of the offender. Attention was drawn to the fact that his photo was constantly being used on the news and in newspapers and on

social media, even in a recent statement confirming Ms Margaret Davies' appointment as the headteacher of Ysgol Friars. It was emphasised that this recreated the victims' trauma and was completely inappropriate. Everyone was asked to focus on the developments underway and the progress seen for the future, from now on.

The Members' observations were reiterated by the Council Leader and the Chief Executive.

The main points of the Meeting's discussion were confirmed as follows:

- To reiterate the request to the Welsh Government for a public inquiry, and share the Government's response to the request with the Members of the Full Council.
- To emphasise the importance of the efficiency of Whistleblowing, Safeguarding and Reasonable Force Policies.
- To ask for the wider distribution of Safeguarding Referral Forms rather than only to Headteachers and Chairs of Governing Bodies.
- To share information about expenditure on support, therapy and counselling for victims to give assurance that we are spending enough on this support.
- To emphasise the importance of the Reasonable Force Policy and that it is given due consideration in the response.
- To give consideration to how to ensure that the safeguarding policy is followed when the information is confidential and not known to all members of a school's governing body.
- To give consideration to ensuring that concerns are taken seriously and that this is reinforced in culture.
- To ensure that record keeping arrangements, and any relevant training, are reviewed and that a dedicated officer be considered to verify the quality of records.
- The need for reassurance of what would be different if someone was to raise concerns today.
- The need to publish a concise and easy-to-read version of the document.

RESOLVED:

To ask the Cabinet to consider the above observations, as well as those from an Extraordinary Meeting of the Care Scrutiny Committee (13 January 2026), an Extraordinary Meeting of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee (19 January 2026) and the Governance and Audit Committee (15 January 2026), in adopting the new Response Plan.

The meeting commenced at 1:30pm and concluded at 3:45pm.

CHAIR