

ITEM 6 - QUESTIONS

Questions by Elected Members

1. Question by Councillor Gwynfor Owen

If you don't already know, a campaign has been started in Harlech by a woman called Andrea Bowen to have a memorial to Catrin, daughter of Glyndŵr. Catrin's story is extremely sad, and she was clearly a very brave woman.

May I therefore ask if the Council would be able to support in principle the community campaign to erect a statue of Catrin, daughter of Owain Glyndŵr, in Harlech, given her direct historic connection to the town through Harlech Castle, and the fact that there is currently no public memorial recognising her sacrifice and role in Welsh history?

Response – Cabinet Member for the Economy and Communities, Councillor Medwyn Hughes

Thanks to the Councillor for his question. Harlech has a prominent role in the history of Wales, and the history of Catrin, the daughter of Owain Glyndwr, is significant in this history. I am sure that Cyngor Gwynedd would, in principle, support a local campaign to interpret the history by creating a statue of Catrin in Harlech. It would be a great opportunity to raise awareness and promote the history to the children and young people of Gwynedd and to visitors to the town and the Castle, which of course is part of a World Heritage Site. I know that officials from the Economy and Community Department are very willing to support the local group, and I am sure that other Council services will also support the campaign to identify a suitable site for the monument.

2. Question by Councillor Beca Brown

A report was published by Audit Wales in January 2021, assessing how successful or otherwise Ffordd Gwynedd had been. A section of the report titled “Culture – Empowerment, Trust and Leadership” warned of two problems: that constructive challenge was being suppressed and that some destructive challenge existed, often from those in authority — something that undermines trust and prevents empowerment.

Both issues contribute to the same systemic risk: a culture where concerns are not raised effectively, where ideas are not shared safely, and where unsafe practices may go unchallenged. Some of the consequences of such a culture were highlighted in the report *Our Bravery Brought Justice*.

Given that these concerns were raised in 2021 — two years before the arrest of Neil Foden — what actions were taken at the time to improve trust and to develop a working culture that empowers healthy and constructive challenge?

Response – Cabinet Member for the Corporate Services, Councillor Llio Elenid Owen

Ffordd Gwynedd is the term used to refer to our way of working here in Gwynedd. It forms 9 work streams which are part of the Organisation Development Plan. There is an emphasis on putting the people of Gwynedd at the centre of everything we do and looking at the service that is provided through the eyes of the citizen.

A piece of work was planned in collaboration with Audit Wales to look at how the culture had been embedded by 2020. The output of that work was a letter summarising the situation. Here is a link to the letter: [Ffordd Gwynedd Letter](#)
Audit Wales' main finding in the letter was that:

"Ffordd Gwynedd is well rooted and driving cultural change, however, there are some common barriers and misconceptions that are slowing down the progress of Ffordd Gwynedd".

The work carried out by Audit Wales was based on interviews with every Head of Department and Director at the time. Among several constructive findings and recommendations, destructive challenge was identified as one obstacle:

"... to feel empowered, you need to be able to trust those around you. They need to be supportive and positive, even when challenging. A safe environment is key, a safe space to experiment and research ideas. A place where it is safe to fail and learn, seeking support and input from colleagues. Clearly, at a higher level in any organisation there is an inherent need to accept and respond to challenge, it is part of the job. However, it must be done in a constructive, supportive way or, otherwise, it can be counterproductive.

At present, in the Council, there are examples where this relationship of trust and constructive challenge does not exist; challenge is often described by some people and is seen by others as destructive."

In response to the Wales Audit letter, as a direct result of these comments, specific steps were taken by Council officers during 2021 to strengthen trust, and to further develop culture.

Following the appointment of a new Chief Executive in May 2021, one of the first steps he took was to try to ensure that each challenge was constructive in nature. The ethos of the Departmental Performance Challenge meetings was changed to one where there was a culture and emphasis of "Challenge and Support". This change supported two basic principles:

1. **Healthy and constructive challenge**, based on clear evidence and leadership; and
2. **Support performance** by strengthening management skills, ensuring consistency, and fostering an approach focused on development rather than criticism.

Since then, the new arrangements have become part of the Council's governance arrangements.

In addition:

1. The training pack for Managers has been reviewed ensuring that it includes the promotion of the culture of constructive challenge. (Similar training was given to Elected Members following the May 2022 election.)
2. The Audit Wales letter was submitted to the Governance and Audit Committee in July 2021 and a Task and Finish Group of Committee Members was established to work with the Chief Executive and Corporate Director to

undertake an in-depth Review of how the way of working was developing generally.

3. The Review included an assessment by each Departmental Management Team of how their department was implementing the way of working.
4. The findings of the Review were reported to the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee in October 2022 with several recommendations on how to continue to develop the way of working. Here is a link to the Scrutiny Committee documents: [Ffordd Gwynedd Working Group Review](#)

The findings of this Review were discussed at the January 2023 meeting of the Council's Leadership Team and again when adopting a new version of the Ffordd Gwynedd Plan for 2023-28 at the Cabinet meeting in March 2023. Here is a link to the Ffordd Gwynedd Plan: [Ffordd Gwynedd Plan - March 2023](#)

Several comments were made by Cabinet Members at the time about different elements of Ffordd Gwynedd including equality, working with external partners and the importance of looking at the Council's services through the eyes of users. Here is a link to the minutes (item 6): [Cabinet Minutes 7 March 2023](#)

We are now halfway through the plan adopted in 2023 and it is the Chief Executive's intention to undertake a further review of progress over the coming months. Reviewing and checking institutional culture is something that should happen continuously and definitely following the publication of the Our Bravery Brought Justice report.

The Our Bravery Brought Justice report has shaken the whole Council and is very relevant in the review of Ffordd Gwynedd. It will be essential to secure Members' input into this Review, and we will be seeking input from Audit Wales this time as well.

As always, when discussing this important topic, it is the victims who are at the forefront of our minds. I endorse this Council's apologies to the victims and all those affected by the crimes. Through the Plan and the Response Board, actions are taking place to ensure that change happens, including change to the Council's culture; this is the greatest tribute we can pay to the bravery of the victims.

Here is a link to Gwynedd Council's Response Plan: [Response Plan](#)