

CYNGOR GWYNEDD - Report to Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet

Title of item:	The Voice of the Child Strategy
Cabinet Member:	Cllr Dewi Jones, Cabinet Member for Education
Relevant officer:	Gwern ap Rhisiart, Head of Education
Date of meeting:	13 October 2026

1. Decision Sought

The Cabinet is requested:

1. To approve Cyngor Gwynedd's Voice of the Child Strategy (**Appendices 1 - 5**)
2. To note that a corporate Action Plan will be developed and implemented to support the implementation of the Strategy across the Council's services.

2. The reason why the Cabinet needs to make the decision

The Strategy establishes a corporate framework for ensuring that the rights, opinions and experiences of children and young people meaningfully influence decisions, policies and services across Cyngor Gwynedd. It also sets consistent expectations across the Council's services and strengthens corporate accountability in relation to the voice of children and young people.

The adoption of the Strategy provides a clear strategic direction for the development and embedding of child and young people's participation arrangements across all service areas. It will ensure a consistent corporate approach to listening to children and young people, using their views in planning and improving services, and demonstrating how their contributions influence Council decisions.

Cabinet approval is required to adopt the Strategy as the Council's official corporate framework and to establish the governance, monitoring and operational arrangements necessary to implement them across the organisation. Without a clear corporate Strategy, there is a risk that participation practices will remain inconsistent between services and that it will be difficult to systematically demonstrate how the views of children and young people inform Council decisions.

3. Introduction

The right of children and young people to be heard is rooted in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, together with the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Bill 2011 and the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. The Strategy builds on these duties and provides a corporate approach to ensuring that the voice of children and young people is integral to the planning, delivery and evaluation of services, as well as decision-making across the Council.

The Strategy sets out a vision where the Council consistently acts based on children's rights, embedding the Voice of the Child in all aspects of the organisation's leadership, culture, processes and systems.

The Strategy is informed by seven pledges for children and young people, including a commitment to ensure that their voice influences decisions, that feedback is provided and that all children have an equal opportunity to be heard.

The Strategy also establishes clear governance arrangements through three main pathways of participation: Education, the Youth Service and other corporate services. These streams come together through the Gwynedd Youth Forum, which provides a formal mechanism for presenting the views of children and young people to strategic decision makers. This ensures that the voice of children and young people is consistently considered within the Council's planning, evaluation and decision-making arrangements.

Within schools, governing bodies will continue to fulfil their statutory functions and their independent strategic role. As part of their role as a critical friend, they are expected to seek assurance that appropriate arrangements are in place to listen to pupils and to consider how their views help shape the school's policies, plans and priorities.

The Strategy does not place any new operational duties on governors, nor does it alter existing school governance arrangements.

The implementation of the Strategy will strengthen the Council's work by:

- Ensuring corporate consistency across all services.
- Strengthening the link between participation and strategic decision-making.
- Ensuring that children and young people at risk of under-representation are heard.
- Strengthening accountability and the ability to demonstrate impact.
- Developing an organisational culture in which listening to children is a normal part of planning and delivering services.

While several mechanisms are already in place across the Council to gather the views of children and young people, there is evidence of variation between services and risks

in terms of consistency and accountability. The Strategy responds to these challenges by providing common corporate expectations and clear operating principles.

The Strategy emphasises that the Voice of the Child is not a task for only one service but a corporate responsibility that applies to all the Council's functions.

The Strategy has been developed with input from children and young people, and an accessible version of the document will be available to them.

4. Rationale and justification for recommending the decision

The Strategy provides the strategic framework needed to ensure that the voice of children and young people is consistently considered in the development of policies, plans and strategic decisions.

The adoption of the Strategy will:

- Support the Council's statutory duties in relation to children's rights.
- Strengthen governance arrangements and corporate accountability.
- Clarify the strategic role of school governing bodies in providing oversight and assurance that pupil voice is appropriately reflected in the school's policies, plans and priorities, without altering their statutory functions or existing responsibilities.
- Ensure that the experiences and perspectives of children and young people contribute to the planning and improvement of services.
- Provide a clear basis for monitoring, evaluating and reporting on the impact of child and young people's participation. The action plan will include performance indicators and regular reporting arrangements to measure the impact of the Strategy.

5. Engaging with Young People

The Strategy has been developed through a process of involving children and young people in shaping the framework, priorities and expectations that underpin the final document. The principles of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child were used as a basis for the work, ensuring that children and young people have the opportunity to express their views, challenge ideas and influence the content of the Strategy. This approach reflects the principle set out in the Strategy that children are rights holders and that their lived experiences are an important source of evidence in decision-making.

During the development phase, children and young people were given opportunities to challenge the draft content, identify areas for strengthening and influence the

content of the final document. As a result, the Strategy reflects the priorities expressed by young people themselves, including the need for real influence on decisions, clear feedback on the outcomes of their contribution, and ensuring that all children have an equal opportunity to be heard.

Bespoke engagement work was carried out with children and young people to discuss the draft Strategy and find out if it reflected what mattered to them. Rather than seeking approval for a document that had already been completed, the sessions were used to identify what was missing, what needed to be strengthened and what would demonstrate in practice that the Strategy was leading to real change. This ensured that the Strategy was informed by the experiences and needs of children and young people rather than just the perspectives of adults. See **Appendix 6** for a full summary of the engagement sessions with the young people.

The influence of children and young people is already visible in the final Strategy. The seven core pledges are drawn directly from their words and priorities, including the need to ensure:

- that their voice influences decisions and is not just collected;
- that all children have the opportunity to participate, not just the most confident;
- clear feedback is provided on what has changed;
- and that their viewpoints reach the decision-makers.

The feedback received has also influenced several core elements of the Strategy, including the emphasis on meaningful participation, inclusion, transparency, accountability and the need to demonstrate impact. As a result, the Strategy sets a clear expectation that success will be able to demonstrate how the views of children and young people have influenced decisions, policies and services, rather than measuring success solely based on the number of engagement activities undertaken.

The contribution of children and young people does not end with the adoption of the Strategy. The document commits the Council to maintaining an ongoing approach to participation through established structures such as the Gwynedd Youth Forum and the Young People's Cabinet, ensuring that children and young people will continue to contribute to setting priorities, monitoring progress and informing the development of services in the future.

Overall, the development process has reflected the central principle at the heart of the Strategy which is that the Voice of the Child is not just about gathering opinions, but about ensuring that children and young people have a real influence on the decisions, policies and services that affect their lives.

6. Composite Impact Assessment

A Composite Impact Assessment has been completed for the Voice of the Child Strategy. The Assessment concluded that no significant negative effects have been identified in relation to protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. The Strategy is expected to have a positive impact by strengthening opportunities for children and young people to be heard and influencing decisions that affect them, paying particular attention to the need to ensure inclusive and representative participation, particularly for those at risk of under-representation.

The Assessment also concludes that the Strategy supports children's rights, promotes equal opportunities, contributes to reducing barriers to participation and is consistent with the Council's duties in relation to human rights, the Welsh language and the Socio-economic Duty. The full Composite Impact Assessment can be found in **Appendix 7**.

7. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The Strategy contributes directly to several of the Act's well-being goals, in particular a more equal Wales, a Wales of cohesive communities, and a Wales of vibrant culture where the Welsh language thrives. It strengthens the rights and participation of children and young people, promotes inclusion and supports arrangements that enable children and young people to influence decisions that affect their lives.

The Strategy also reflects the five ways of working by adopting a long-term approach to embedding the voice of the child in the work of the Council, promoting prevention by understanding children and young people's experiences earlier, integrating participation across services, working with children and young people and relevant stakeholders, and ensuring that inclusion is at the heart of governance and decision-making arrangements.

8. Observations of the Statutory Officers

8.1 Chief Finance Officer

I support the decision sought and I am satisfied that no direct financial commitment arises from it.

8.2 Monitoring Officer

The opening paragraphs of the Strategy underline the cross-Council nature of the legal framework that underpins this important document. There is a recognised place for the voice of children and young people across all Council work that is relevant or affects them. By preparing a clear strategy a corporate framework is established that should act to highlight the requirements of course, but also the expectations on all the Council's services to give these rights their proper place. I am satisfied with the propriety of the decision sought.

List of Appendices:

Appendix 1 – The Voice of the Child Strategy

Appendix 2 – The Voice of the Learner in Education

Appendix 3 – The Voice of Learners in Children's Services

Appendix 4 – The Voice of Children and Young People Forums

Appendix 5 – Strategic Integration and Governance

Appendix 6 – Results of the Engagement with Children and Young People

Appendix 7 – Composite Impact Assessment