CYNGOR GWYNEDD - Report to Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet

Title of item:	Recommendations arising from the Panel Performance Assessment – The Council's Response
Cabinet Member:	Cllr. Nia Jeffreys
Relevant officer:	Dafydd Gibbard, Chief Executive
Date of meeting:	10th November 2026

1. Decision Sought:

The Cabinet is requested to:

1. Welcome and accept in full the recommendations of the Panel Performance Assessment report and implement them as soon as possible.
2. Approve the draft response and Action Plan addressing the Assessment's recommendations, and recommend that the Full Council adopt them at its meeting on 3 December 2026.
3. Note that the Governance and Audit Committee reviewed the draft response on 22 October 2026 and recommended no changes.
4. Support the intention to present an update to the Governance and Audit Committee within 12 months on progress in implementing the recommendations.

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

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 sets a duty on the Council to conduct a Panel Performance Assessment at least once within an electoral cycle, and to prepare a response to the assessment's conclusions and recommendations.

The report and draft response are submitted to the Cabinet to consider the findings and proposed actions before recommending their adoption by the Full Council. Under the Council's arrangements, responsibility for adopting the response to the Panel's report and recommendations rests with the Full Council.

3. Introduction and Rationale

3.1 Background

The Panel Performance Assessment forms part of the statutory framework for reviewing local government performance and governance arrangements in Wales. It is linked to the duty to undertake an annual self-assessment and considers the extent to which the Council:

- exercises its functions effectively;
- is using its resources prudently, efficiently and effectively; and
- has robust governance arrangements in place for ensuring the above.

The Panel Performance Assessment is not an audit or inspection. Its conclusions should be read alongside the Council's self-assessment, internal audit work, and external and regulatory audits. The report, however, provides a valuable independent challenge and notes the development areas that will strengthen the Council's ability to deliver its priorities in a sustainable manner.

The Council commissioned the Welsh Local Government Association to carry out the assessment. The Panel included 4 persons, including an independent Chair; a peer from the broader public, private or voluntary sector; a serving senior local government officer (CE or Director level), and a senior elected member (from outside the Council). A list of members for the Panel in Gwynedd can be seen below:

- Emlyn Dole – Chair (Former Leader of Carmarthenshire Council)
- Cllr Gwyneth Ellis - Elected Member (Denbighshire Council)
- Rob Thomas - Senior Officer (Chief Executive of the Vale of Glamorgan Council)
- Sian Elin Flint Freel – a peer from the broader, public, private or voluntary sector

The work was carried out on the site over four days, between 10 and 13 March 2026. The work included reviewing documents, data and external reports, as well as meetings and focus groups with elected members, officers, staff, trade unions, partners, businesses, residents and town and community council representatives.

The work focused on three themes that the Council had identified as areas where external insight would be particularly valuable:

- **Governance and Leadership:** To what extent do political leaders and senior officers set clear instruction and encourage change, and are the governance structures and decision-making processes robust enough to secure better long-term outcomes for residents?
- **Strategic Planning, Resources and Capacity:** Do we have the capacity and ability to deliver on our strategic priorities, and are the available resources effectively aligned with those priorities?
- **Monitoring, Measuring and Evaluating Performance:** Do we have suitable arrangements in place to monitor and assess the performance of the services provided to customers and residents, to ensure continuous improvement?

See **Appendix 1** for the week's programme, which demonstrates the breadth of the work and the wide range of opportunities the Panel had to challenge and observe during its time here.

3.2 Main findings

The Panel concluded that Cyngor Gwynedd discharges its performance duties under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

It was noted that there are robust governance arrangements in place, constructive relationships between members and officers, and a clear commitment to continuous

improvement. A strong sense of pride was also expressed in the County, a commitment to its cultural and social identity, and the Council's reputation as a reliable and cooperative regional partner.

At the same time, financial pressures and workforce challenges mean that there is a need to speed up the organisational transformation whilst building on progress already made. The Council should also better merge its performance management and risk arrangements, ensuring a clear link to the Corporate Plan and continue to support transparent decisions, firm scrutiny and constructive challenge.

A final copy of the Panel Performance Assessment Report was received in June 2026, and it includes 7 recommendations for the Council. A full copy of the Panel Performance Assessment Report can be seen in **Appendix 2**.

3.3 The Panel's Recommendations

In accordance with Section 93 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, the Council is required to prepare a response to the Panel Performance Assessment report, noting:

A. To what degree the council accepts the findings of the report regarding the extent to which it meets the performance requirements;

- It's recommended that we welcome and accept the findings and recommendations of the Panel Performance Assessment. A number of the recommendations relate to matters that had already been identified by the Governance Group, some of which are already being progressed.

- It was extremely valuable to have a Panel of experienced individuals here for a week, and their work was thorough and inclusive. The work of Members and Officers was observed and challenged, and a substantial volume of relevant documentation was considered. It was particularly valuable to receive independent views from individuals who have contributed and worked in leadership roles in Local Government across the country.

- The report's conclusions are positive and provide assurance that the Council is operating appropriately in fulfilling its duties. This is clearly to be welcomed, but the report also makes recommendations which, if adopted, would provide us with an opportunity to aim even higher and deliver better outcomes for the residents of Gwynedd.

B. To what degree the Council intends to implement any recommendations in the report; and

C. any steps that the Council intends to take to increase the degree to which it meets the performance requirements.

The recommendations of the Panel are as follows:

Recommendation	Details of the Recommendation
Recommendation 1a *Strategic Planning*	Cyngor Gwynedd should build on the current theme-based approach when preparing and developing the next Corporate Plan, with a focus on: • Long-term planning • Setting a vision for Gwynedd and the values that are essential to achieve it • Ensuring an approach that focuses on the key strategic priorities for the Council and Gwynedd as a place • Including staff, members and the wider community to develop and achieve a place-based Corporate Plan • Fully aligning with the Council's Medium-term Financial Plan and Transformation Strategy
Recommendation 1b *Strategic Planning*	Cyngor Gwynedd should review the capacity of its strategic leadership at an operational level to enable it to achieve its key priorities and plan for the long-term.
Recommendation 2a *Transformation*	Ensure that the workforce is at the core of strategic planning and transformational work in the future, bringing together the different areas of practice that already exist within the Council, in order to ensure a whole-Council approach to internal inclusion and engagement.
Recommendation 2b *Transformation*	Cyngor Gwynedd should develop a united transformational approach which clearly sets-out the organisation's general direction and priorities for change. This approach should: • Operate on a whole-organisation strategic level • Continue to realise and utilise the value of partners • Be integrated with the Medium-term Financial Plan, and be funded through this • Provide a firm foundation for securing the organisation's long-term financial resilience
Recommendation 3 *Resources and Working in Partnership*	In order to build capacity and strengthen collaboration with partners: • Bring the adopted economic strategy live on all levels across Gwynedd • Realise the potential for working in partnership with town and community councils • Increase the council's ability to achieve its economic/social ambitions • Ensure that the Mantell Gwynedd Agreement is implemented and monitored in full
Recommendation 4 *Risk*	Cyngor Gwynedd needs to develop and agree on a corporate risk strategy, which expresses the Council's risk appetite and: • Ensures an up-to-date corporate risk register and strategy • Defines the role of the leadership team, the governance and audit committee, the Cabinet, and the Full Council in supervising and monitoring the strategy and register regularly

	• Consider the training and development needs of members on supervising the council's risk
Recommendation 5 *Performance Management*	Cyngor Gwynedd should refine and merge its performance management arrangements, with a specific focus on showing contributions to: • Deliver the Corporate Plan • Link Corporate and departmental risks • Increase the opportunities for challenge by peers across and beyond the Council

In response, a draft Action Plan **(Appendix 3)** has been formulated, which outlines the actions and arrangements intended to be put in place to address the recommendations and support continuous improvement.

3.4 Consideration by the Governance and Audit Committee

The Panel Performance Assessment report and draft response were presented to the Governance and Audit Committee at its meeting on 22 October 2026.

The Committee resolved to accept the draft response to the report, recommending no changes. It also welcomed the intention to provide an update in 12 months on progress in implementing the recommendations.

The draft response is therefore submitted to the Cabinet with no changes recommended by the Committee.

4. Implications and Relevant Considerations

4.1 Resources and Finance

The Panel's recommendations emphasise the need to ensure that the Council's strategic priorities and transformation work align with the Medium-Term Financial Plan. The Panel's report does not identify the total cost of implementing the recommendations and associated Action Plan, nor does it include a specific request for additional funding. These matters will be considered as the individual plans within the Action Plan are developed.

4.2 Risks

The Panel has highlighted the need to respond to financial pressures and workforce challenges, and to strengthen the links between planning, performance and risk. The draft response and Action Plan seek to address these issues.

4.3 Equality, the Welsh Language and Well-being

The report does not specifically assess how adopting the response would affect equality, the Welsh language or well-being. The implications for all three areas will need to be considered as the individual plans within the Action Plan are developed.

5. Next steps and timescale

Following consideration by the Cabinet, the Panel Performance Assessment report and draft response, including the Action Plan and any amendments arising from the Cabinet's discussion, will be submitted to the Full Council on 3 December 2026 for adoption.

Following adoption of the response, arrangements will be made to publish the final Panel Performance Assessment report and the Council's response. Copies will be provided to members of the Assessment Panel, the Auditor General for Wales, Estyn and the Welsh Ministers in accordance with statutory requirements.

6. Views of the Statutory Officers

6.1 Chief Finance Officer

The Panel Performance Assessment offers useful recommendations for further strengthening the Council's governance arrangements. Finance officers will support the Council as necessary as it addresses the action plan.

6.2 Monitoring Officer

The Performance and Performance Assessments arrangements in Part 6 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 were established as a new regime which came into force between 2021 and 2022. The completion of the Performance Assessment by a Panel represents the implementation of the final part of the steps that need to be realised within the term of the current Council. It is therefore a significant step in that sense. The pathway to completion of the Panel Assessment is highlighted in the report. It will be a matter for the Full Council to accept the report and approve the response plan following the consideration by the Governance and Audit Committee. I am satisfied that the process has been implemented in accordance with the statutory requirements and within the timescale for the publication of the Councils response

Appendix 1 - The programme for the week of the Panel's visit

Appendix 2 - Cyngor Gwynedd Panel Performance Assessment Report: March 2026

Appendix 3 - Action Plan in response to the Recommendations from the Panel Performance Assessment