

**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC
SAFEGUARDING PANEL**

2021-22

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline the work of the Strategic Safeguarding Panel for the period January 2021 to March 2022, giving a clear and fair picture of the work achieved and to summarise the opinion of external inspectors on the work.
- 1.2 The report outlines the work achieved by the Council itself and by the Council in partnership with others, during the period in question. If information regarding safeguarding work by the Council has already been published, such as in the [Annual Report of the Statutory Director of Social Services](#), by external inspectors, or by other organisations, we refer the reader to those documents rather than reiterating this information. A list of these reports can be seen in Section 8.
- 1.3 Lastly, the report outlines the future priorities of the Strategic Safeguarding Panel.

2. RESPONSIBILITIES AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- 2.1 The aim of the Strategic Safeguarding Panel is to ensure that appropriate arrangements and procedures are in place at a corporate level across the Council to ensure the safety of children, young people and adults. Since 2017/18 the Panel is also responsible for an overview of wider safeguarding issues across Gwynedd, such as Community Safety.
- 2.2 The Panel in turn is accountable to the Statutory Director of Social Services, namely the Corporate Director in the Council's case, who has the final accountability for safeguarding issues.
- 2.3 The Chair of the Panel for the period in question was Councillor Dilwyn Morgan, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, supported by the Corporate Director, Morwena Edwards. The other members were: Cabinet Members for Adults, Health and Well-being; Education; Corporate Support, Heads of Children and Supporting Families; Adults, Health and Well-being; Corporate Support; Education; Monitoring Officer; Gwynedd and Anglesey Community Safety Partnership Manager and the Chair of the Safeguarding Operational Panel.
- 2.4 The Safeguarding Operational Panel supports the Strategic Panel to implement its priorities and to deal with operational and practical issues in the area of work. This is an internal panel of officers, with the safeguarding champion of each Council department serving on it, to ensure the ownership of safeguarding issues by the whole Council.

2.5 The Council's performance in the safeguarding field is assessed by independent external inspectors as part of their work in assessing wider performance. Links to the external inspectors' reports can be seen in Section 8.

3. PROGRESS AGAINST SAFEGUARDING ISSUES

3.1 It has been a very challenging time for the Safeguarding field, mainly as a result of Covid-19 and the challenges relating to the virus. Regardless, the Strategic Safeguarding Panel has continued to arrange online meetings and move the agenda forward.

3.2 Safeguarding Children

3.21 This past year has been challenging for the Children's Department as a result of issues regarding Covid-19 including lockdowns, staff recruitment and retention, as well as work pressures.

3.22 It is true that the service's work pressures have been extreme during the year. Staff have been working long hours, and it is fair to say that many staff members have felt the strain. Regardless of all this, the service has continued to implement safeguarding arrangements.

3.23 However, Covid-19 pressures on staff has made it difficult for the Children's Department to recruit and retain qualified staff. As a result, an individual has been commissioned to work in the field, with the hope of completing this work by April 2022.

3.24 By the second half of 2021, Social Workers were arranging face to face contacts, as well as contacts with young people who have since left the Council's care. Unfortunately the Child Protection Case Conferences continued to be arranged virtually.

3.25 Despite Covid-19, the response to referrals relating to safeguarding issues within the Childcare Service was 99% at the end of the year. The percentage of risk assessments submitted to a Case Conference which were considered as exhibiting quality in decision making was also 99%.

3.26 At the end of the year 49 children were on the Child Protection Register, and 5,265 new referrals were received between April and December 2021.

3.27 During the year, the number of looked after children decreased to 269, with 39 becoming looked-after, and 61 having left care.

3.28 Safeguarding Adults

- 3.31 Following a significant increase in the number of safeguarding reports submitted at the start of the year, the numbers balanced out during the second half of 2021, and there are now approximately 50 reports submitted monthly.
- 3.32 There aren't any particular themes in the reports although negligence is one of the main mistreatments that have been reported during the year.
- 3.33 The lack of understanding in terms of the need for the individual to give permission for the report is still causing problems. It is vital that individuals are central to the process - it is possible to refuse any intervention if there is capacity.
- 3.34 The guidelines state that the initial enquiries need to be completed within 7 working days. The Safeguarding Unit has delivered approximately 94% of the enquiries within this time on a regular basis. However, a significant drop can be seen in the last quarter of the year, and the response time within the statutory requirement has plummeted to 75%. It appears that there are various reasons for this - the lack of reporting correctly but mainly, agencies' delay in responding within the timetable. The pandemic has put significant pressure on the agencies and although work is being done to ensure the safeguarding of individuals, there are delays in receiving the required information and evidence to close the enquiry.
- 3.35 In light of Covid-19, there were concerns that it was not possible to hold monitoring visits to the Council's homes, with four homes under the 'Escalating Concerns' procedure regarding reasons varying from lack of control, documentation problems, bathing concern and lack of overview. The impact of this is that beds are empty in the homes during this period. An embargo was put on new entries during this period, which meant that the beds were empty during the period. By now, the embargo has been lifted in three of the homes and the beds have since been filled.
- 3.36 There were concerns for the DoLS (Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards) service during the year as there were 550 on the waiting list at one point. However, a successful bid of £100,000 was received from the Government to address the waiting list. The Department commissioned an agency to complete assessments on their behalf and extend two of the best benefit assessors' contracts within the team. The waiting list will have significantly decreased by the end of March 2022.

3.29 Education

- 3.41 Schools were required to close for periods during 2021 as a result of Covid-19. Naturally, this resulted in the county's children and young people moving to virtual learning or home education.

- 3.42 In addition to this, some parents chose to continue teaching their children from home when the schools reopened. Although the numbers were relatively low, the number of pupils being taught at home during Covid-19 increased. The increase was mostly among vulnerable families.
- 3.43 The parents' main reasons for teaching their children at home were concerns about Covid-19 issues, including the element of wearing face masks. With schools open for vulnerable children and teachers teaching all day there was no option of arranging online lessons.
- 3.44 During these periods, officers from the Education and the Children and Supporting Families Departments continued to follow the current teaching and safeguarding guidelines in order to retain contact with children and families who were opting for home education.
- 3.45 In due course, the Welsh Government intends to legislate a requirement to register a child if they receive home education.
- 3.46 As a result of the emergence of the Everyone's Invited website, attention was given to sexual harassment within schools during the year. Although emphasis is being placed on safeguarding women in schools, there needs to be reactive action and address misogynistic culture among men to get to the root of the problem.
- 3.47 Deriving from sexual harassment concerns, attention was given to equality within schools, and a one-off bid was approved to have an expert in education to look at matters such as LGBT, poverty and period dignity, where a precedent will be placed for future actions.

3.30 Domestic Abuse

- 3.51 There was national concern that domestic abuse was increasing nationally as a result of Covid-19. Last year, the number of cases were low in Gwynedd. However, unfortunately data from the Police shows an increase in the number of domestic abuse offences in Gwynedd during the last two quarters. There is an increase of 21.4% in Quarter 3, which is slightly higher than the increase seen across the whole of North Wales (18.9%) for the same period. Recently, the Regional Fragility and Exploitation Board reported that domestic violence specialist providers have seen an increase of 35-40% in referrals.
- 3.52 There is good co-operation between the Council and relevant Organisations and efforts to raise awareness to report domestic abuse continues. This matter will receive

attention during the Partnership's next meetings, to ensure that enough is being done to get messages out to the public.

- 3.53 A lot of national attention has been drawn to Domestic Abuse in the last year, and there is a concern that the real number of people being abused domestically is higher than what is reported as a result of Covid-19. As a result, the situation would have to be monitored during the next years and ensure that messages to raise awareness are handed out on a regular basis.
- 3.54 In December 2021, the Welsh Government announced a consultation on its National Strategy regarding abuse against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. The consultation's intention was to look at the main priorities to prevent this abuse, as well as the principles of the approach, including how the Welsh Government will work with their partnerships. It is expected that the consultation results will be published in 2022.
- 3.55 Yet again this year, efforts have been made to encourage staff to complete the Domestic Abuse e-module. Ensuring that staff have received this training is vital to ensure that the Council is doing everything within its ability to support individuals and to raise awareness.
- 3.56 By the end of the year, 3,258 had completed the e-module. This is an increase of 1,481 since the same period last year (1,777). Despite the increase, only 49% of all the Council's workforce has completed the e-module, therefore promoting its importance and increasing the number of staff members completing the e-module should continue.
- 3.57 Similarly, the Ask and Act training continued to be provided for the Education; Adults, Health and Wellbeing; and Children and Supporting Families departments. A programme of events is in place, which will be introduced by the Child Protection Chair and Coordinator as well as the Safeguarding Adults Coordinator in partnership with RASAC North Wales for care sector staff; and by the Child Protection Senior Officer and Gwynedd Council's Organisational Learning and Development Manager in partnership with Hafan Cymru for the education sector's staff.
- 3.58 As a result of the complexity of jointly presenting the Ask and Act training, along with the Council's capacity to present, we may buy-in from external providers in the future. A programme is being planned for this. The Children and Adults Departments are eager to continue to run some sessions for the care sector staff in partnership with RASAC Wales as a significant percentage of the work of this workforce relates to families experiencing domestic abuse.

3.59 Furthermore, arrangements will be put in place to train some workers to Level 3: Ask and Act during the year 2022. Before completing Level 2, it is required that every worker has completed the e-module.

3.60 We must remember that not all Council staff members have easy access to the Council's IT systems, and it is difficult to ask casual staff to commit to completing the e-module. The Organisational Learning and Development Service is working closely with Departments such as Highways and Municipal to identify different ways to reach frontline staff that are without IT access. Staff turnover is also high, which is affecting the total number completing the training.

3.61 Watch this video by Carey Cartwright, Gwynedd Council's Learning and Development Manager, emphasising the importance of Safeguarding:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q5Kjl8cvOW4>

3.31 Crime

3.61 As a result of the lockdowns during the year, a decrease in the number of crimes, of all sorts, was seen that were reported to the Police. The biggest decrease was seen in acquisitive crimes of all sorts, and violent crimes. Following the lifting of Covid restrictions, the number of crimes slowly increased compared to the numbers reported before the first lockdown, although not all of them (e.g. residential burglary, vehicle crimes).

3.62 An increase in the number of racially motivated hate crimes was seen, which has been connected mostly to tensions between individuals that result in verbal abuse, which unfortunately can be seen across the country as people's movements during the Covid restrictions could cause friction. The national definition of hate crime, as used by the Police, includes discrimination due to race including countries within the UK, i.e. Welsh/English, therefore this is how such events were recorded.

3.32 Modern Slavery Statement and Ethical Employment in Supply Chains.

3.71 In the Community Safety Partnership meeting held in the autumn, the Police noted that the cases of Modern Slavery in the area were mainly relating to drug misuse, and mainly arising from cannabis farm workers and foreign nationals being traded through Holyhead's Port for the purposes of working in the UK.

3.8 Counter-terrorism

3.81 In December 2020, the latest Local Counter-terrorism Profile for Wales was received, which looked at risk matters in relation to counter-terrorism. Through this Profile,

Gwynedd was identified as a region with a low risk level; however, the aim is to continue to raise awareness in the field. We anticipate that the new Profile will soon be available, and that our plans will be updated accordingly.

3.82 In September 2021, Gwynedd Council's Protective Security Preparedness Group was formed. The purpose of the Group is to:

- Collaborate with organisations to provide effective and efficient protective security arrangements in Gwynedd
- Provide an integrated safeguarding approach, which complies with the national standards and guidelines, to identify and provide proportionate actions to keep communities safe in Gwynedd
- Improve and support the preparedness to safeguard and protect in accessible public areas in Gwynedd.

3.9 Prevent

3.91 Towards the end of 2020, work was carried out to create an Prevent Plan. Gwynedd was a low risk area in relation to radicalisation and extremism; however, risk factors needed to be highlighted.

3.92 The Home Office confirmed that individuals working on their own were the highest risk in Gwynedd in relation to mixed unspecific ideologies.

3.93 In light of the Prevent Plan, this year we have started working with the North Wales Prevent Advisor from the Home Office in order to continuously monitor risks and share information.

3.10 Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)

3.10.1 The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) is responsible for processing criminal checks. This year, with the Operational Group's support, the Strategic Panel has focused on understanding the DBS procedure better in order to develop the processing system.

3.10.2 The purpose of DBS checks is to help employers make safer recruiting and licensing decisions, although the check is only one part of the recruitment process. When the check has been processed and completed by the DBS, the applicant receives a DBS certificate.

3.10.3 The Executive Group has undertaken some significant work to check, challenge and revisit the corporate procedure on behalf of the DBS. As a result, Departments now take

more ownership of the DBS procedures and this has transformed how the Operational Group reports on its conformity on departmental disclosures. This means that it is possible to report departmentally, which is noted in the table below:

- 3.10.4 In examining the current DBS process, the Education Department expressed a wish to move to a different DBS procedure, mainly because of every DBS's portability, and that the current procedure through Liverpool is taking six weeks, which is far too long.
- 3.10.5 As a result of Covid-19, emergency DBS forms were being sent to Powys Council to be processed through the E-bulk procedure between March 2020 and October 2021, to employ emergency workers as soon as possible.
- 3.10.6 Evidence has shown that the necessary information is returned within 3 days for emergency care workers. In addition, the error rate is 0.02% when using E-bulk, compared to 10.8% with our usual procedure.
- 3.10.7 As a result of the positive effect of using E-bulk through Powys Council, it has been decided that Gwynedd Council should use the E-bulk system, and to set milestones on the commissioning steps for an opportunity to reflect on the system.
- 3.10.8 The only concern regarding using the E-bulk system is that it was not available through the medium of Welsh. However, following putting pressure on the system's owners, it will be available in Welsh soon.
- 3.10.9 By the end of the year, the E-bulk system was being used by Gwynedd Council, with every application being processed through this system. This means that the use of paper copies is reduced, along with applications being returned much faster (one application was returned within a day).

4. PRACTICE REVIEWS

- 4.1 Wales has developed a Child Practice Review (CPR) framework to improve the culture of learning lessons from child protection cases. 'Brief' or 'extended' reviews exist depending on the circumstances of the child in question. They are undertaken by the North Wales Regional Safeguarding Children's Board with the aim of learning lessons to be shared in order to try to avoid such cases in the future.
- 4.2 The North Wales Regional Safeguarding Adults Board also conducts Adults Practice Reviews, in accordance with the Social Services and Well-being Act (Wales) 2014. The purpose of these Reviews is to note the lessons to be learnt from complex and difficult Adult Safeguarding cases, and to implement changes to improve services as a result of these lessons.

5. WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

- 5.1 Although the Strategic Safeguarding Panel focuses on corporate responsibilities regarding safeguarding issues within Gwynedd, it also receives information and guidance via Regional Safeguarding Boards for Safeguarding Vulnerable Children and Adults working across north Wales. These are Statutory Boards with cross-agency membership and specific statutory and legal responsibilities. The Council is a member of these Boards and contributes to implementing their plans. Further information regarding the work of the Boards can be seen here - <https://www.northwalessafeguardingboard.wales/> and links to the Boards' annual reports can be seen in Section 8.
- 5.2 Gwynedd and Anglesey Community Safety Partnership has also shown that working in partnership across county borders is proving to be a success. Since the change to virtual meetings, attendance has been excellent in every meeting and every partner is contributing positively. The Partnership Manager serves on the Safeguarding Strategy Panel, and the Partnership work in areas such as Atal/Prevent are essential if the Panel is to ensure the quality of safeguarding arrangements in Gwynedd.
- 5.3 Several organisations have a statutory duty to be part of the partnership, including Local Authorities, Police, Probation Services, Fire and Rescue Service and the Health Board. Information on all aspects of community safety that the Council deals with is on our [website](#).
- 5.4 Information about the Gwynedd and Anglesey Community Safety Partnership as well as the 2020 Community Safety Local Plan can be seen [here](#). The Plan is monitored and reported back to members every quarter. In spite of the pandemic's continuous effect on our partners' work priorities, most actions are developing well. There will be scope to include any unfinished actions in the next plan if appropriate.
- 5.5 The Partnership is required to report formally to the Care Scrutiny Committee annually, in order to give an overview of the Partnership's main strategic developments over the year. No concerns were raised in the Scrutiny Committee in January 2021.

6. THE FUTURE

- 6.1 Despite the fact that excellent work is being undertaken in the safeguarding field within departments, the Panel intends to reflect on the working arrangements of the Strategic Panel and the Operational Group in order to ensure that we operate effectively. It is intended to undertake this work in early 2022, and introduce any

changes to the implementation of the group and the panel in a timely manner, in preparation for the meetings of summer 2022 onwards.

6.2 In terms of the Panel's priorities for the upcoming year, it is intended to obtain the consent of Panel members to focus on the following priorities:

- Domestic violence and violence against women
- Ensuring appropriate arrangements to safeguard refugees
- Continue to monitor and manage the impact of Covid-19 on the safeguarding responsibilities of services

7. INDEPENDENT INSPECTIONS RECEIVED DURING THE PERIOD

As has already been noted, external agencies review the work of Gwynedd Council in order to ensure compliance with standards. The reviews conducted during the period of this Report are listed below:

Care Inspectorate Wales:

- [Annual Performance Review Letter to the Local Authority in 2020/21: Gwynedd Council](#)
- [Annual Performance Review Letter to the Local Authority in 2019/20: Gwynedd Council](#)
- [Annual Performance Review Letter to the Local Authority in 2018/19: Gwynedd Council](#)

8. LINKS TO FURTHER READING

- [The Annual Report of the Director of Social Services 2020/21](#)
- [Annual Report of the National Independent Safeguarding Board Wales 2020/21](#)
- [North Wales Safeguarding Board - Annual Report 2020/21](#)