



**ANNUAL REPORT OF
THE CORPORATE
PARENT PANEL**

2021-22

1. Introduction

This report is submitted to highlight the Council's role and responsibilities to act as corporate parents for looked after children, to share information about the panel's work over the last year and to outline the panel's intentions for the future. The report contains up-to-date information about the numbers and the trends related to the field of looked after children.

Contrary to last year's report, this report will highlight the work that has been done as we move through a post-Covid recovery period.

2. What does the Panel do for me?

2.1 Gwynedd Council and its partners has a clear responsibility to be a Corporate Parent for every child in Gwynedd, and specifically to ensure effective, stable, safe and suitable care for looked after children and young people, including those who are leaving care. The Council takes this responsibility seriously, and is committed to ensuring that the children and young people in its care have the best possible opportunities in life, and that they receive appropriate care, a high-quality education, live in fixed accommodation, and receive good health care.

2.2 Children and young people come into Council care under very difficult circumstances, but the Council is as ambitious for these children as anyone would be for their own children. Any child that is looked after by the Council has the right to expect the same from his/her corporate parent as he/she would from a good parent.

2.3 This means that the Council will:

- Know its children - their needs, talents, dreams, and will promote their interests
- Be ambitious about their future and will expect the best from them and for them
- Be interested in their successes and problems and be proud of their successes and celebrate with them
- Listen to their opinion and ensure that this influences practice, and developments in services and policies
- Ensure that they are part of planning their own lives and consult with them on their choices
- Acknowledge, support and respect their identity in every way
- Promote and support their educational attainment to the best of their ability, ensuring access to a high standard of education and extensive learning opportunities
- Support resilience in their health and emotional well-being

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- Provide a safe and stable home where there is a feeling of belonging and appreciation
 - Support their journey from childhood to adulthood and promote their economic potential and prepare them to be responsible citizens who contribute to society as a whole.
- 2.4 Most importantly, as a Corporate Parent, the Council will ensure that it thinks, plans, acts and makes decisions in the best interests of the children in its care.
- 2.5 To support this role, the Council has established a Corporate Parent Panel consisting of the Lead Member for Children and Young People, the Leader of the Council, relevant Cabinet Members, a foster parent, the Young People's Champion and a member selected by Scrutiny Committees. The Panel also includes the Chief Executive, Corporate Director and Statutory Director of Social Services, Head of the Children and Supporting Families Department and Head of Education. Through the Panel, the Council, namely all the elected members, delegates its responsibilities in the field to the Lead Member for Children and Young People.
- 2.6 The Corporate Parent Panel has a specific and direct responsibility to ensure that appropriate and suitable multi-agency services are available for looked after children, and that the services offered to them are of a high quality, accessible and meet their needs, working with partners to ensure the best possible outcomes for all looked after children.
- 2.7 The Corporate Parent Panel is also responsible for setting up task and finish groups that will focus on specific fields in order to look closely at the quality of services, successes and obstacles as well as finding out about experiences directly from children, young people and carers, in order to improve the experiences of looked after children in Gwynedd. The Panel has a right to request that matters which are a cause for concern to it be scrutinised on its behalf by the Scrutiny Committee.

3. What about Covid-19?

- 3.1 With the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic back in March 2020, we had to adapt the way of working in order to continue to maintain essential services for the County's children. A number of steps were put in place to ensure support for looked after children throughout the pandemic period and this was highlighted in the 2019-21 Annual Report.
- 3.2 During 2021-22, we took time to recover after the pandemic, and although some ways of working during the pandemic have continued, with a number of meetings

still being held virtually, we commenced the work of getting back to the new 'normal'. Nevertheless, the department ensured that it worked within national and local guidelines to ensure the safety of its staff and looked after children.

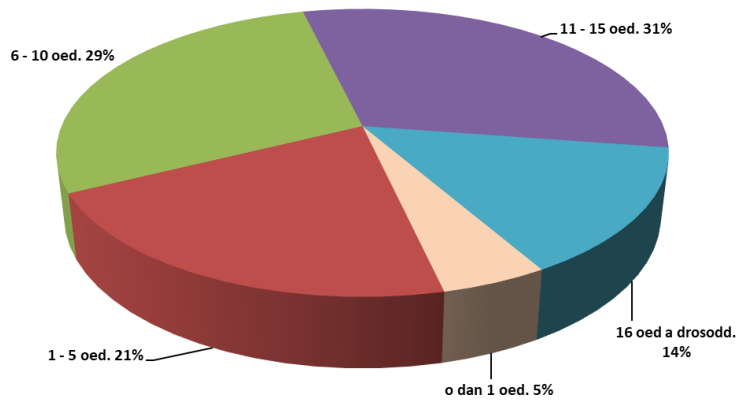
4. What is the current situation?

4.1 The following information is presented based on end of quarter four figures 2022, including comparative figures from the previous six years:

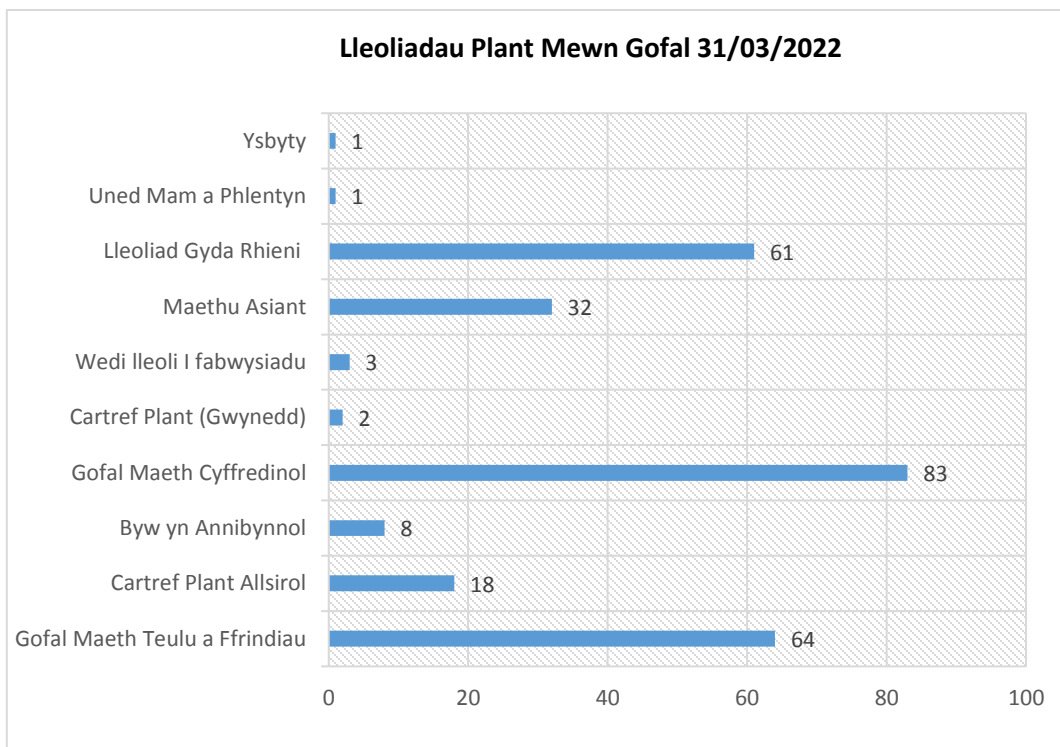
Looked after Children on 31 March	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17
Number of looked after children at the end of the year	273	281	291	253	227	218
Number of children coming into care during the year	46	46	82	66	49	60
Number of children leaving care during the year	54	56	44	40	40	49
Number of children adopted during the year	2	6	6	5	9	5

4.2 The data shows that there has been a reduction in the number of looked after children over the year. Whilst 46 children came into care for the first time during the year, 54 children have left care.

4.3 The chart below shows the age range of looked after children:



4.4 Of the total number of looked after children, 179 (66%) are in foster placements, 20 (7%) are in residential placements and 63 (23%) are in placements with parents. Three children were in adoptive placements at the end of the year, with eight young people living independently with support.



4.5 Geographical Locations

- 4.5.1 At the end of the year, 86 (32%) of looked after children were placed outside of Gwynedd. Of these, 36% were in Anglesey and Conwy, with 62% of children outside Gwynedd placed in north Wales. Twenty-five children are placed outside Wales, with eight of these in residential placements and the rest are either in placements with parents or relatives.
- 4.5.2 A variety of reasons lead to the demand for residential placements, and in each case the needs of these children and young people are complex and profound, e.g. mental health and self-harm issues, sexual exploitation, harmful sexual behaviour. Placing within the County is therefore not an option in such cases.
- 4.5.3 The biggest challenge we face as a Council is finding suitable residential placements for those with the most complex needs. This issue is not unique to Gwynedd and is being addressed on a national level through investigations by the Welsh Government and the Public Accounts Committee.
- 4.5.4 For some children, there is a choice for the Council to place with general foster carers within the County or with extended family. The extended family could be living outside the boundaries of the County. Therefore, the outcome for the child is to be placed out-of-county, but that the placement continues within the extended family. At the end of the year, 19 children were in this type of placement.
- 4.5.5 The rest of the out-of-county placements in the County are foster placements with Gwynedd Carers (who have normally moved to live outside Gwynedd), or placements with private foster agencies. The vast majority of the foster carers who are registered with private agencies live outside Gwynedd.

4.6 Very Young Children Coming into Care

- 4.6.1 The latest data shows a continuation in the number of children aged under five years coming into care. Up to the end of quarter 4 2022, 33% of new looked after children placements are for children under five years of age.
- 4.6.2 Over four years, children under five years old represent 47% of all new placements. This is due to a number of reasons, but specifically, the abuse and neglect of young children; domestic violence; substance and alcohol misuse; the deliberate feeding of young children with drugs, and mothers whose previous children have entered care becoming pregnant and not having made the necessary adjustments in their lives to be able to safely care for the child.

4.7 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

During November 2021, every Local Authority in England and Wales received a Home Office directive regarding the placement of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children under the National Transfer Scheme. Local Authorities in South-east England were not able to continue to cope with the numbers that were arriving, and consequently, every local authority has now received an allocation. This cohort of young people will therefore be an addition to the Council's number of looked after children.

4.8 Between December 2021 and March 2022, three Asylum Seekers were received. Very little background information is available in these cases, and identifying suitable placements is incredibly challenging due to their age, linguistic and cultural needs and very often due to the trauma they have experienced. Gwynedd Council's original allocation was six young people under the first phase of the scheme, therefore, we expect another three to arrive early in 2022-23.

4.9 The three who have been received in Gwynedd are over 16 years of age, one is placed in a foster placement in Gwynedd and two are placed outside Gwynedd. The Council retains responsibility for each of them whilst the Home Office considers their individual cases. There is a specific process to follow and they need a specialist advocate. Their Social Workers will plan and review their care and act as a mediator to facilitate their application for permanent refuge. Creating and retaining contact with the Refugee Council and others is essential as we do this.

4.10 Edge of Care Team

4.10.1 Between April 2021 and March 2022, the Edge of Care Team worked with 160 children (91 families). The team started working with 75 new cases during this period.

4.10.2 During the year, the team's intervention ended with 86 children (45 families). 63 of these were living at home with their parents without a care order at the start of the intervention. At the end of the intervention 53 continued to live at home (84%).

4.10.3 In addition, the intervention ended in 12 cases where the children were in foster care at the beginning of the work. Seven of these children had returned to live with their parents at the end of the team intervention (58%).

4.10.4 In addition to edge of care intervention, the service has two Social Workers who focus specifically on whether the child needs to continue to be a looked after child. If safe to do so, the social worker submits a report at court with a request to revoke the care order. During the year, 23 children left the authority's care as a result of this work. Work is under-way in another 26 cases to revoke the order at the end of the period. During 2021-22, 54 children left care, which means that the total

number of children who left care during the year is greater than the number of children who came into care. This work is therefore essential as the Council addresses the Welsh Government's objective to reduce the number of looked after children.

5. I want suitable access to the health services

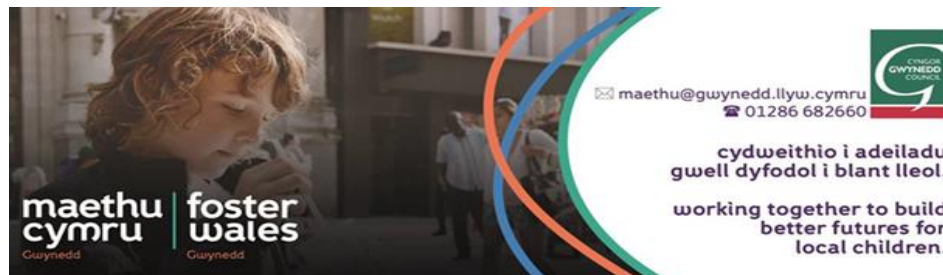
- 5.1 The continued links between health, local authority and other services have been maintained during the year. Virtual meetings via Teams has provided a robust platform for discussion and follow on meetings to be arranged quicker to involve relevant stakeholders. This has included the Safeguarding Partnership Meetings with Health and Local Authority for early identification and planning for causes of concern and any risks identified.
- 5.2 During the year, initial LAC health assessments were being completed by the Paediatricians with face to face clinic appointment for all assessments where there was no clinical risk. Adoption medicals were also being completed face to face and Paediatricians met with prospective adopters for health summaries. Review health assessments were being completed by the LAC Nurse/ School Nurse or Health visitor within timescales wherever possible. 334 health assessments were due during the year, with 57% held in the required timescales.
- 5.3 The links between CAMHS have been maintained and improved with monthly meetings to improve standards and work on the LAC/ CAMHS Flowchart to improve access to mental health services. Recommendations from this meeting were to highlight a baseline for mental health wellbeing for the children coming into care; To do this by means of a carers report to be utilised and used for reference for early intervention as required, which will be part of the next discussions with the local authority and IRO teams.
- 5.4 The ICF funded LAC Nurse post for the Edge of Care/ 16+ team has highlighted specific needs/ gaps for those leaving care and needing support, especially when transitioning into adult mental health services. This post has been effective in providing targeted support and preventative work for this group of young people.
- 5.5 During the year the health LAC team have attended Dialectical Behaviour Therapy and Solution Focussed Brief Therapy training, in relation to parenting developmentally traumatised children to support the work being done by Social Workers. Awareness sessions with EMRALLT have also been attended to raise

awareness and assist in working with children who present with sexual harmful behaviours. This has provided consistent training opportunities between nursing and local authority teams.

- 5.6 A Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board pilot involving the WCCIS online database began in January 2022. This is ongoing and should help IT links and shared digital recording as well as improving communication and working together with the local authority, which is essential for Children Looked After and their families.
- 5.7 The All Wales LAC Health Assessment Framework has also been launched. This will provide guidance to health professionals on the completion of LAC health assessments to ensure uniformity and quality.
- 5.8 There are continued difficulties with neuro developmental referrals due to a waiting list of 2 years, however the Children Looked After caseload are being prioritised.

6. I want a good place to live

- 6.1 Foster care of the highest quality is a resource that is vital in enabling the Council to ensure that its commitments to looked after children are carried out. The Council is proud of its ability to provide foster care of the highest standard and it invests heavily in recruiting, assessing and registering local foster carers for children in Gwynedd. However, there is national recognition that mainstream fostering services are continuing to report on the net loss in the total number of approved households. A key challenge for all Welsh Local Authorities Fostering Services is to improve the number of enquiries and the approval of new foster carers.
- 6.2 The work done under the National Fostering Framework is key in order to focus on ensuring a sufficient number of foster carers with sufficient support and skills to satisfy the increasing demand for placements for children and young people with increasingly complex needs. This assists Local Authorities to meet this demand.



- 6.3 During the year, a very significant milestone was seen with the launch of Foster Wales. Now, all Welsh Local Authority fostering services are a part of Foster Wales. Every local authority's service keeps its own identity and now the Gwynedd fostering service is known as the Gwynedd Foster Wales Service.
- 6.4 There are now new arrangements in place, and a National Joint Committee was established for the National Fostering Service and Foster Wales. The Council's Cabinet approved and adopted the governing arrangements in March 2022 and the Cabinet Member for Children and Supporting Families will represent the Authority on the Joint Committee.
- 6.5 The direct provision of the service continues to be the Council's responsibility, but marketing and collaboration to attract new foster carers is the subject of collaboration on a regional and national level. During the year, a National Marketing Manager was appointed to lead on this work.
- 6.6 In addition, a Regional Marketing Officer was appointed in January 2022, who is employed by Gwynedd and responsible for fostering marketing for the six Local Authorities, including developing a recruitment and marketing strategy, implementing local and regional recruitment campaigns, developing content for the social media channels and websites and coordinating the national recruitment and marketing priorities.
- 6.7 The Regional Needs Analysis has been conducted and this will be used to steer the regional and local Recruitment and Retention Strategy for 2022-25. The work of gathering data for this task has been completed and the strategy was completed during April 2022.
- 6.8 Locally, building our internal fostering provision is essential in order to continue to improve outcomes for children. This means moving the balance of care and the resources of our Fostering teams to enable growth and being able to respond to demands. At the end of March 2022, 147 children were placed with Gwynedd Foster Carers. Of the 46 children who came into care in 2021-22, 33 of them are placed in foster care.
- 6.9 At the end of March 2022, 70 mainstream foster homes were registered with the Gwynedd Foster Wales Service. This is a reduction of one in a year. During the year, a number of foster carers retired after many years of service. Although we registered new foster carers during the year, we did not manage to increase the total.



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- 6.10 Foster carers are responsible for looking after the children in their care as though they were their own children, and for ensuring they have the best opportunities, advocate on their behalf and collaborate well with parents, social workers and partners. At the end of the year, 3% of looked after children in Gwynedd had experienced three or more moves in their placement. This means, on the basis of the 2020-21 national performance, that Gwynedd foster placements offer a very high level of stability for looked after children.
- 6.11 A high percentage of children looked after by the Council are placed with their own family members who become registered foster carers because of the children's legal status. We fully commit to taking responsibility for providing the same practical and professional support for these families as for any other foster placement, since the challenge of looking after a child from one's own family is one that is fully acknowledged.

7. I want less children in my situation

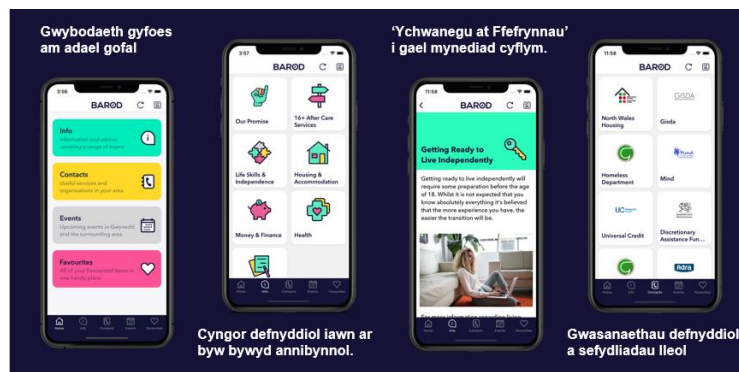
- 7.1 At the start of 2019, the First Minister of Wales, Mark Drakeford, announced that one of the priorities of the Welsh Government would be to reduce the number of looked after children, and local authorities were required to set a numerical target to reduce the numbers in order to measure success against this target.
- 7.2 Gwynedd Council decided that it would not set any numerical or percentage target in relation to the number of looked after children, as the local authority has a duty to ensure that every child is safeguarded from harm.
- 7.3 Gwynedd Council is monitored on a quarterly basis on the strategy to get children out of care. In fact, there has been a steady increase nationally in the numbers of children coming into care. The Council has been very aware of the increase, and also aware of the importance of implementing plans to reduce the numbers coming into care. However, the Children's Department is totally convinced that all looked after children in Gwynedd need to be in care due to the factors that have led to the

need for the Council to intervene to protect them. The statistics this year show a 2.9% reduction in the number of looked after children in Gwynedd.

8. Which projects have developed this year?

- 8.1 Work has continued to transform the former NatWest bank in Caernarfon into flats, a training flat and multi-agency space, with employment opportunities also available. Individuals for whom we have a responsibility as a corporate parent will be targeted, and this project will be an opportunity for young people to gain independent living skills from the Council and GISDA, along with other agencies.
- 8.2 Now, a tool that was created jointly with the young people for independent living, is operational. Our young people have been involved in this work, and they have been able to contribute to the development of the package by having the opportunity to provide input into every part of the development.
- 8.3 The process of leaving care and moving to live as an adult can be challenging and confusing. The 'Barod' app has been created to let young people know about the support that is available from the Post-16 Team as they leave care. There is a need to ensure the best for every child; inside and outside care.

We are aware that this is a unique and important period in their lives, and the Council is responsible to ensure that the support is available. In order to give them the best opportunity to reach their potential, laying a smooth pathway for them is essential. As the app has been created with advice from the young people, as well as those who see and experience this daily, it ensures that the necessary information is on the app.



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- 8.4 During February 2022, the Welsh Government announced that it would be launching a Basic Income Pilot Scheme for young care-leavers across Wales. This is a very significant development for those young people, which will give them a pre-tax income of £1600 per month. We are collaborating with the Government to prepare for the launch of the scheme in July 2022 and it is anticipated that 21 young people will be eligible for the pilot in Gwynedd.

9. I want a good education

- 9.1 Bold steps have been taken during the past year in order to ensure the education system's understanding and ownership of its functions as a corporate parent.
- 9.2 The link between looked after children, schools and the education department has strengthened as a result of the Looked After Children Education Coordinator being located within the department for the first time in a long while.
- 9.3 We have succeeded to convert the personal education plans of looked after children in Gwynedd schools onto an on-line system. This facilitates the process of planning for a looked after child on a school level and facilitates the access of foster parents and professional workers to the child's plan. The child can see and contribute to the plan if they wish at any time.
- 9.4 As the plans are produced digitally, we can now check the quality of the plans, and ensure that the children receive suitable targets in a timely way.
- 9.5 During the next year, we are eager to develop Social Workers' use of the on-line system and extend the use of the system to children who are placed out-of-county also.
- 9.6 During the year, a new procedure was established in order to ensure that no looked after child will be permanently excluded without intervention by the education service and children services.
- 9.7 We have succeeded in a recent application for a grant to trial the role of a Virtual Head for looked after children here in Gwynedd.
- 9.8 We are of the opinion that the additional role corresponds with what is here already and ensures a specific focus on promoting educational interests and outcomes. It is anticipated that we will appoint to the post during the summer term with the role to be operational at the start of the academic year.

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- 9.9 We anticipate that the Head will undertake aspects where the call to reach an opinion on the quality of the provision and progress of the pupil is key. The Head will work with the schools to ensure that the provision is excellent and that the learners' progression is good. This can happen in many ways but the majority of the Head's work will relate to ensuring that the schools have the best skills, resources and support for the learners, not doing the work instead of the school, as this would not be sustainable.
- 9.10 The Head will monitor individual plans and the progress of pupils and, where appropriate, will refer the schools to specialist services in order to empower them. These could be services in fields such as additional learning needs, inclusion or specific services or support from children's services and beyond. This role will tie in with the implementation of a range of services, including children services, youth justice services, to name but a few.
- 9.11 **Grants**
Bursary grants have been conveniently provided to those where the schools made a request for them; the examples of ineligible applications were rare. As usual, a range of applications were seen, including a set of drums and a drumming lesson, and revision resources.
- 9.12 The cluster grants have been divided through the regional service, with each cluster investing in training and resources to target the needs of looked after children.
- 9.13 It is anticipated that the Virtual Head will play an operational role in instructing the clusters' use of this grant from September onwards.
- 9.14 **LAC Results (KS4)**
With the examinations continuing to be teacher assessments over the year, the end of stage results were no different to the projection, for every individual, and the young people had the same opportunities to choose a post-16 learning pathway / experience, based on their results.
- 9.15 During the next year, the examinations will return to the old system and there will be an increased focus on securing support and stability for learners, leading to and during examination periods.
- 9.16 **Performance Data and the Voice of the Child**
The authority's personal education plans are being created, monitored and reviewed on a digital platform that was developed by the authority. However, the authority's

access to pupil performance data is restricted as the Welsh Government reduces the reporting requirements on schools.

- 9.17 In response to this, we have investigated different ways that key data can be gathered in order to populate all personal education plans and we will continue to develop these plans over the next year. We intend to collaborate with schools' existing systems, and not place an additional requirement on them.
- 9.18 We are aware of the need to gather the child's views about the standard of their education. We will investigate different ways of including the voice of the child and treating it as quantitative information.

10. What will the Panel do this year?

- 10.1 With the Local Government elections being held in May 2022, this is seen as an opportunity to re-establish the arrangements of the Corporate Parent Panel. It was an opportunity to look at the chairpersonship and membership of the Panel and it was resolved that the chairpersonship would fall to the hands of the Council's Chief Executive.
- 10.2 Furthermore, there has been an opportunity to re-visit the Panel's internal arrangements, and now, a member of staff has been appointed to carry out the work of coordinating the panel's work and coordinate reports for the panel.
- 10.3 During the first months of 2022/23, work will be done to reconsider the Panel's strategy. This will give the new Councillors who will be a part of the Panel an opportunity to highlight their priorities over the period to come and ensure that the child is at the centre of all of the panel's implementation.
- 10.4 As a result of the strategy, it will be possible to identify the fields where further work is required or fields that need to be strengthened. Hearing and listening to the voice of the child will remain a priority for the Corporate Parent Panel. The Corporate Parent Panel has been working to strengthen this element of its work so that it maintains close links with what matters to looked after children in Gwynedd. As a result, it will be possible to identify any barriers they come across and take action in order to remove those barriers to the best of our ability.
- 10.5 Usually, Corporate Parent training is provided to all of the Council's Elected Members on an annual basis. Training was not available over the last year. With the election being held in May, arrangements are in place to hold training sessions in November.

11. To end

Much good work has been done over the past year, and this by building on the work that has been done over recent years.

Further work will need to be done over the next year to ensure that the Panel's amended arrangements have been carried out, as well as developing the strategy early in 2022/23. In addition, there will be a need to continue to ensure that the voices of looked after children are heard and that they influence the services that are available to them.