

**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC
SAFEGUARDING PANEL**

2018-2020

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline the work of the Strategic Safeguarding Panel (Strategic Panel) for the period December 2018 to December 2020, giving a clear and fair picture of the work achieved and to summarise the opinion of external inspectors on the work.
- 1.2 As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, this report is published later than usual, as several Council staff have been redeployed to the work of supporting our communities. Therefore, this document reports on work over a period of two years rather than one year. The essential work of safeguarding our residents has of course continued, it is only the task of reporting on this work that has been delayed.
- 1.3 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 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 9.
- 1.4 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 Member for Adults, Health and Well-being; Education; Corporate Support; Heads of Children and Supporting Families, Adults, Health and Well-being, 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. WORK ACHIEVED DURING THE PERIOD DECEMBER 2018 TO DECEMBER 2020

3.1 Up to 2018 safeguarding issues were a priority area within the Council's Plan in order to focus its energy on updating the arrangements. The next natural step was to build upon those arrangements during the period up to the present, and of course in the future.

3.2 The Strategic Panel set itself a challenge for this period, namely to focus on making progress in four priority areas.

3.3 1. Governance Arrangements of the Safeguarding Strategic Panel

Purpose: Review and Improve the Governance Arrangements of the Strategic Safeguarding Panel and the Operational Panel

What needed to be done?	Progress made	The future
Develop measures to measure performance against the purpose	<p>A work programme and a communication plan for safeguarding messages with staff, are continually fine-tuned. The current update has been agreed by the Operational Panel in December 2020. A questionnaire was used to conduct a survey of staff awareness of their responsibilities in the safeguarding field between January and February 2020, and it is a method of measuring the success of the Operational Panel's work. Amendments were made to the work programme following the assessment of the results.</p> <p>Attendance in the Operational Panel has increased over this period as each departmental champion has stronger reporting responsibilities, especially when gathering information about DBS judgements.</p> <p>It is deemed that we need to continue to build upon the work of developing measures and the Operational Panel will continue with the work.</p>	Further progress is needed to ensure that the measures are incorporated in the work of departments.

Ensure that the appropriate administrative and specialist support is available for the work within the Panels.	The Strategic Panel and the Operational Panel receive administrative support via the Democracy Service. The support of practical services such as the Organisational Learning and Development Service and Communication and Engagement enable the work programmes to be realised.	Delivered - continue to maintain the standard
Ensure that the Panels meet within the Performance Cycle.	The Strategic and Operational Panels have met regularly throughout the period in question, and have also continued to meet virtually over the Covid-19 period.	Continue to maintain the standard
Adapting the Terms of Reference	<p>The new Terms of Reference is in place, and the membership and accountability arrangements are clear.</p> <p>Attendance in meetings has strengthened, with the Operational Panel focusing specifically on embedding the responsibility for safeguarding matters across all Council's departments. This has ensured regular attendance from a representative from every department, with everyone contributing to specialist elements.</p> <p>The Corporate Safeguarding Policy has been updated, and the Departmental Policies are in the work programme for delivery by the end of the 2020/21 financial year.</p>	Continue to maintain the standard and complete Departmental Policies

3.4 2. Regional Safeguarding Meeting Arrangements

Purpose: To better understand the local and regional safeguarding landscape

What needed to be done?	Progress made	The future
Conduct an audit to analyse all the local and regional meetings within the Safeguarding field.	<p>Work has been undertaken at a regional level during 2020 to review, simplify and avoid duplication in terms of all the groups that exist and are active in the safeguarding and community safety area.</p> <p>Collaboration across the counties of Gwynedd and Anglesey has strengthened by having 2 Coordinators who work across both counties.</p> <p>There is further work to be done to see how the audit outcomes change the local landscape.</p>	Reflect on the local arrangements as a result of regional changes

Review and rationalise the Safety Partnership regional groups	The work of reviewing and rationalising has been completed, and a new structure is in place. Gwynedd Council officers have been identified to be part of the regional groups and they will report back at a local level.	Discussions will take place on how to continue to administer the meetings
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3.5 3. Adults at Risk

Purpose: Ensure that Gwynedd Council's response to 'adults at risk' corresponds to the requirements of the Social Services and Well-being Act (Wales) 2014.

What needed to be done?	Progress made	The future
Undertake a review of the Council's Internal Safeguarding arrangements dealing with Adults at Risk	<p>An audit of internal arrangements was conducted and now Gwynedd and Anglesey councils are looking into joint safeguarding cases. This arrangement has meant that we have wider resources and expertise than we would have if we worked separately.</p> <p>A Safeguarding Hub has also been established in the Adults, Health and Well-being Department since autumn 2017, and a Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) Coordinator has been appointed.</p> <p>A focus activity was conducted in 2019 by Care Inspectorate Wales and following their recommendations the Adults Department is operating a work programme.</p>	Continue with the new arrangements
As part of the review, track some cases in order to identify any lessons	This exercise was conducted and the new arrangements in place have improved performance in terms of the documenting decisions.	Continue with the new arrangements

3.6 4. Training

Purpose: Ensure a workforce with up-to-date safeguarding knowledge

What needed to be done?	Progress made	The future
Create a comprehensive Safeguarding course for the workforce, to include all safeguarding matters	Following the publication of the new Child Protection Guidelines the Council has provided on-line training since July 2020.	Continue to promote e-learning courses as one

<p>and the flexibility to be tailored as required</p>	<p>A number of e-learning courses have been developed on-line during 2018-2020 in the areas of Protecting and Safeguarding Children, Safeguarding Adults, Domestic Abuse, Prevent and Modern Slavery.</p> <p>A message was sent by Councillor Dilwyn Morgan, Chair of the Strategic Safeguarding Panel to staff (via a range of Communication channels, including social media) asking all staff to complete safeguarding training, specifically on the above elements.</p> <p>5,540 of these sessions had been completed by 9 December 2020. One tool amongst several is the on-line training module; however, this should not be depended upon as the only method of learning, nor the only measure of understanding safeguarding issues.</p> <p>Between January and March 2020, Council staff were requested to measure their awareness of their responsibilities in the safeguarding field. From the responses received, 96.6% were aware of their responsibilities to draw attention to any suspicion that someone was being abused; however, the figure reduced to 70% for those who believed they knew what to do if they thought someone was being abused and at risk, where an urgent or non-urgent response was required.</p> <p>The results of the questionnaire proved that further work was needed to ensure that every Council staff member knows <i>what</i> to do, and therefore a new work programme has been developed by the Operational Panel, that will be continuously modified, to clearly communicate the main safeguarding messages.</p>	<p>method of raising awareness and learning about safeguarding issues.</p>
<p>Providing Ask and Act training</p>	<p>As a result of the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015, the Welsh Government</p>	<p>Training programmes</p>

	<p>issued a national training framework that includes six elements of training. All public service professions belong to one of these groups and every member of the Council's workforce is required to receive the relevant training.</p> <p>The Welsh Government expected Councils to have completed 50% of the training by the end of 2017; however, this target was not achieved for various reasons, including the availability of <i>train the trainers</i> programmes and Welsh medium materials.</p> <p>By now, 4 trainers have received training during the period 2018-2020 (in Adults, Education and Corporate Support Departments).</p> <p>In addition, a new Ask and Act virtual training programme was developed by staff from the Organisational Learning and Development Department and the Education Department, which had to await approval from Welsh Government. A successful 'pilot' course was conducted in November 2020 by staff from the Education Department and the Organisational Learning and Development Department, where staff from the Education Department received training. A 12 month programme is now in place for the Education Department. The workforce development team is developing a programme for Care staff.</p>	<p>will be conducted to reach the Welsh Government's aim, and to ensure that more members of staff complete these.</p>
<p>Ensure that all the Council's workforce complete a Domestic Abuse e-module.</p>	<p>In 2019, all Gwynedd Council staff members were asked to complete a Domestic Abuse e-module. Despite this, the response has been very disappointing thus far, with only 1,852 members of staff having completed the e-module by the end of 2019. This figure has increased to 2,491 by the end of 2020, therefore a small increase has been made; however, it is necessary to continue to increase the number of staff</p>	<p>Analyse and understand why the figures are so disappointing (e.g. via a questionnaire) and try to find a solution that leads to an increase in the</p>

	who complete the module, and to promote its importance.	numbers who complete the e-module.
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4. WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

4.1 The period between December 2018 and December 2020 saw the strengthening of work arrangements in partnership with other local Gwynedd agencies and regionally across north Wales.

4.2 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 there are links to the annual reports of the Boards in Section 9.

4.3 During the period of this report the Council has also strengthened its working partnership with **Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board** in several fields; however, the safeguarding field has benefited as the Council and the Health Board now monitor the quality of nursing care in joint care homes. Once more, this is successful good practice that will continue in the future.

4.4 There was also good collaboration in the Children's field, especially during the pandemic. Covid-19 brought new challenges to the service and the relevant Partnerships; however, it was possible to continue to collaborate and discuss the challenges that they faced in order to fully implement their responsibilities.

5. GWYNEDD AND ANGLESEY COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

5.1 **Gwynedd and Anglesey Community Safety Partnership** have also demonstrated that working in partnership across county boundaries has proven successful. The Partnership Manager serves on the Safeguarding Strategic Panel, and the Partnership's work in areas such as *Prevent* is essential if the Panel is to ensure the quality of safeguarding arrangements in Gwynedd.

5.2 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 the Council deal with is on our [website](#).

- 5.3 Information about the Gwynedd and Anglesey Community Safety Partnership as well as the 2020 Community Safety Local Plan can be seen [here](#). Elements of this work plan have been delayed this year as a result of Covid-19 as it was not possible to hold face-to-face campaigns in our communities; however, the work as a whole has not relaxed.
- 5.4 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, together with the commissioning work that sets the framework for the priorities which are based on a strategic assessment. No concerns were raised in the Scrutiny Committee in 2019 or 2020.

6. WIDER SAFEGUARDING ISSUES

6.1 Safeguarding Children

- 6.2 At the start of 2019, the First Minister for Wales, Mark Drakeford, announced that one Welsh Government's priorities 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.
- 6.3 Gwynedd Council determined 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.
- 6.4 As the purpose of the Children's Services is to ensure that things improve via a suitable and appropriate practice, and not by complying and reaching a target, they focused on improving practice, understanding Service requirements, continuous improvement and eradicating barriers to deliver the best for children.
- 6.5 The Covid-19 pandemic saw new trends in child referrals that led to a concern by the service about the cases that they did not reach. There were several reasons for this including children not attending schools, and front-line health services being redeployed to specific roles in response to the crisis. This meant that there was substantially less direct contact with families than usual.
- 6.6 There was a significant reduction in the number of referrals to the service at the start of the pandemic. Over time there was an increase, with referrals returning back to what would be expected by September, but by the end of the year, the numbers had reduced once more and this means that it is necessary to understand and analyse the reason for this to ensure that the Children's Department puts everything necessary in place to ensure that agencies and the public are aware that the service is available to respond to any matter as usual.
- 6.7 The ability of the service to respond to referrals or to conduct timely safeguarding investigations did not deteriorate. The service ensured that regular, direct contact

occurred with children who were at risk and children on the Child Protection Register in accordance with Covid-19 guidance. There was no waiting list in place for a service and the workforce was available continuously throughout the period and it was possible to ensure that new cases of concern of significant harm that needed to be presented to the courts could be heard in a timely manner in virtual courts.

6.8 Safeguarding Adults

6.9 Since 1 September 2020, new Safeguarding Guidelines have been in operation. These new guidelines place more emphasis on the individual's voice within the safeguarding process, and differentiate between concern for wellbeing and concern about the safety of individuals. Consequently, there was a change in the Corporate Safeguarding Policy to ensure that it was in line with the new Guidelines. Every Department is expected to adapt their own safeguarding policies to comply with the Policy and Guidelines.

6.10 In terms of referrals to the Adults, Health and Well-being Department during the Covid-19 pandemic, they were low at the start of lockdown, however, they increased and were substantially higher than the monthly average of 50 referrals in July (73 referrals) and August (80 referrals). It appeared that there was no specific pattern in relation to the reason for the referrals.

6.11 By the end of 2020, the significant increase in referrals had continued. The increase has been noted as a risk, therefore the Department will keep an eye on the level of referrals.

6.12 Home Education Regulations and Guidance

6.13 As a Council we share the concerns of the Children's Commissioner for Wales and ADSS Wales regarding the delay in 2020 by Welsh Government bringing in new legislation via the Senedd to regulate the home education field. The increase in the number of children taken out of the school system to be educated at home this year has highlighted the need to have clear guidelines for both local authorities and families on how to ensure the welfare and safety of any child. We are talking here about children who are permanently home educated, rather than children who undertake distance learning from the home during the Covid-19 period.

6.14 In accepting that Covid-19 has an impact on the work of most organisations, we are also concerned that there is no clear commitment by the Minister for Education regarding if, and when the legislation journey will recommence. It was expected that statutory guidelines would replace the non-statutory ones in September 2021, however, there has been a delay until September 2022 as a result of the pandemic. The Children's Commissioner has expressed disagreement regarding this delay.

6.15 In the meantime, officers from the Education and the Children and Supporting Families Departments continue to follow the present learning and safeguarding guidelines in order to retain contact with children and families who opt for home education.

6.16 By the second half of 2020, it was noted that there had been an increase reported in the number of families that request to permanently educate their children at home. It was likely that the reason for this increase is that some of the children, or household members, are in the shielding category, and the concern is that the child would bring the virus home. Consequently, the Council has been strengthening the process regarding Home Education in order to implement a plan to transfer back to school.

6.17 Domestic Abuse

6.18 There was national concern that domestic abuse was increasing nationally as a result of Covid-19; however, in May 2020 it was noted that the number of cases in Gwynedd was low.

6.19 By the end of 2020, the number of domestic abuse cases reported was exactly the same as 2019. Bearing in mind that so many more people are home during the lockdown period, this is a matter of concern as it begs the question whether sufferers are too afraid to report about their situation and that they live in situations of risk. However, it was confirmed that there was good collaboration between the Council and relevant organisations and that efforts had been made to raise awareness of reporting domestic abuse.

6.20 Crime

6.21 As a result of the pandemic, the levels of nearly every category of crime had reduced in May 2020. On average, the crime levels in Gwynedd was 23% lower than the same time the previous year.

6.22 In July and September, the rates started to gradually increase again. Crime categories such as stalking, harassment, anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse had risen again to the expected levels.

6.23 However, the majority of the crime categories remained substantially lower than expected, and by the end of 2020 crime levels on the whole were 15.2% lower than at the same time in 2019.

6.24 Modern Slavery Statement and Ethical Employment in Supply Chains

6.25 This work now falls within the strategic regional structure and investigations by North Wales Police have identified local cases that justify the priority given to modern slavery by the North Wales Police Commissioner. These investigations confirm the

need for public bodies to work together to meet the requirements of the Slavery Act but also to safeguard the welfare of vulnerable individuals.

- 6.26 In January 2020, the Panel adopted operational measures for the coming year to ensure that the Council has specific arrangements in place, namely posting the guidelines and pathways to refer suspicions/cases on the Gwynedd Council website, establish a single point of contact, publish a specific annual statement regarding how the Council avoids Modern Slavery within business activities and the supply chains and training for staff.
- 6.27 In July 2018, the Council Cabinet approved the Welsh Government Code of Practice for ethical employment in supply chains, which aims to ensure that every organisation in the public sector acts to eradicate unlawful and unethical employment practices.
- 6.28 Following the commitment to the Code, in 2019 the Council published [Gwynedd Council's Modern Slavery Statement 2020/21](#).
- 6.29 The latest developments against the Code of Practice and the Slavery Statement can be seen in this document - [Action Plan 2020-2021: Welsh Government Code of Practice](#). In addition to the description of the Council's internal employment arrangements, it demonstrates that the principles of ethical employment are also embedded in our procurement arrangements and our tendering processes.
- 6.30 Counter Terrorism
- 6.31 The Local Counter Terrorism Profile for Wales has been completed, this 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.
- 6.32 Prevent
- 6.33 In 2020, work proceeded to bring a Prevent Plan together. Gwynedd was a low risk area in relation to radicalisation and extremism; however, risk factors needed to be highlighted.
- 6.34 The Home Office confirmed that individuals acting alone was the highest risk in Gwynedd in relation to mixed unspecific ideologies.

7. PRACTICE REVIEWS

- 7.1 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 Safeguarding Board with the aim of learning lessons to be shared in order to try and avoid such cases in the future.

7.2 During the period (October 2019) the results of one extended case practice review (ECPR) has been published - [ECPR Gwynedd 1 - 2015](#)

7.3 The North Wales Safeguarding Board also conduct Adults Practice Reviews, in accordance with the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 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.

8. THE FUTURE

7.1 As can be seen in the tables in Part 3, the Panel has further work to do to ensure that some matters are strengthened further - this includes access to appropriate and effective safeguarding training and using appropriate measures.

7.2 The Panel will continue to monitor the safeguarding position of Gwynedd residents as a result of the pandemic by looking at the impact of this at the level and nature of the demand on the options of how to respond.

7.3 Once the work pressure as a result of the pandemic reduces, it is proposed for the Panel to hold a reflective session to assess if there are any matters that require specific attention by the Panel. In addition, the Panel will continue to receive appropriate updates to have assurance that safeguarding matters receive appropriate attention within the corporation.

9. 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 2018/19: Gwynedd Council](#)

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

10. LINKS TO FURTHER READING

[Annual Report of the Director of Social Services 2019/20](#)

[National Independent Safeguarding Board Wales – Annual Report 2019/20](#)

[North Wales Safeguarding Board - Annual Report 2019/20](#)

[North Wales Safeguarding Board - Annual Report 2018/19](#)