



SOCIAL SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25



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****In order to protect the privacy of individuals, we have changed names in the stories that appear in this report****

FOREWORD BY THE DIRECTOR

Over the past twelve months, full priority has been given to responding to a heinous cases of child abuse in Gwynedd. In many areas, this meant delays in other work programmes. Although these were difficult decisions, they were essential: safeguarding children and adults is at the heart of our work.

While much of the safeguarding work takes place quietly, behind the scenes, its impact remains deep and lasting. Safeguarding is not just a burden on one team or department, but everyone's responsibility, the Council, our partners, Gwynedd communities, and the public. Everyone has a role to play.

Too often, we think of "us" and "them" — the professionals on one side, the ones receiving support on the other. But the truth is that the line between providing and receiving help is thinner than we assume. Any one of us, at any time, may need care, assistance or safeguarding. That is why the principles that underpin all our safeguarding work are so important. These are not just theories but practical values that influence all decisions, responses and support provided on a day-to-day basis. The principles are:

1. **Empowering:** Our goal is to empower people to make decisions about their own lives. Individuals should always be included in the process, that is, "no decisions about me without me". Our role is to support individuals to take ownership of their situations where possible.
2. **Prevention:** We work to prevent harm before it happens, or before it gets worse. This means raising awareness, promoting dignity and respect, and ensuring safety for everyone in Gwynedd. Preventative work can seem thankless or slow at times, but it is essential and effective.
3. **Proportionality:** We do as much as it takes to keep someone safe — no more, no less. The aim is not to overreact, but to provide the appropriate level of support.
4. **Safeguarding:** From public bodies to residents, we all have a role to play in keeping our communities safe. While the significant increase seen in the number of referrals for Children and Adults is worrying, there has been a decrease in some types of social misconduct.
5. **Partnership:** In practice, this entails meaningful collaboration with agencies such as the Police, the Health Board, the third sector and other Council departments. But it also means working alongside individuals, families, councillors, schools, providers, and communities.
6. **Accountability:** The principle of accountability means that everyone involved in safeguarding must take full responsibility for their actions and decisions. That includes listening carefully, learning from experiences, and acting clearly, honestly, and purposefully.

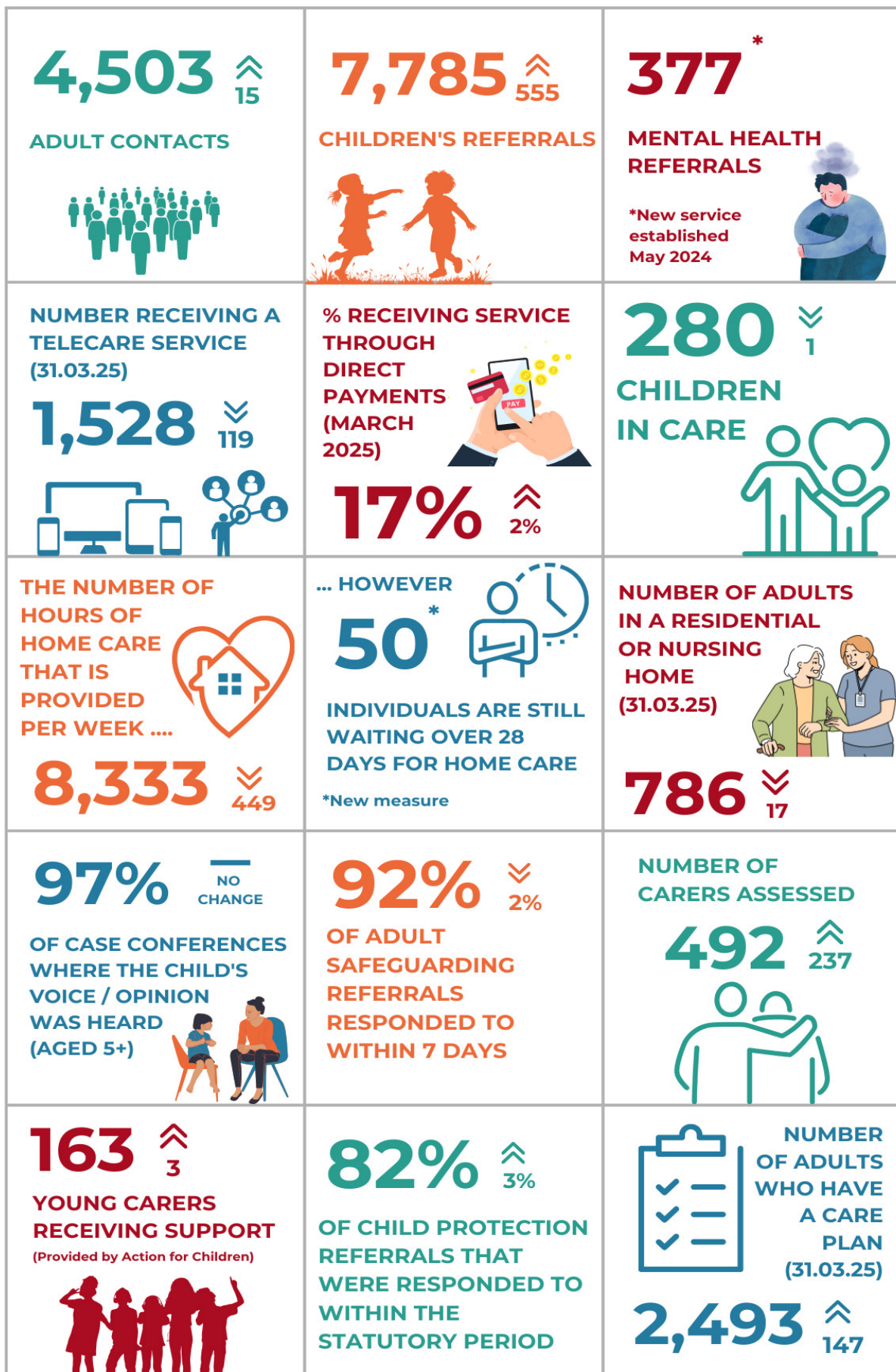
While the following pages in this report illustrate the breadth and depth of Gwynedd's social services work this year, from early intervention to care and support, due to the nature and severity of recent disclosures, there was a need to focus not only on individual cases, but on the systems, principles and culture that underpin the way we safeguard people.

In recent months, the Council's Response Plan has begun to unify learning from several areas and organisations. Led by Professor Sally Holland, this programme is beginning to embed the key principles of real, practical and interconnected change. Currently, the Child Practice Review process is on-going. The report is expected to be published around September. We are committed to accepting and acting on any recommendations arising from it, to ensure that our safeguarding methods and strategies are appropriate, robust and fit for purpose.



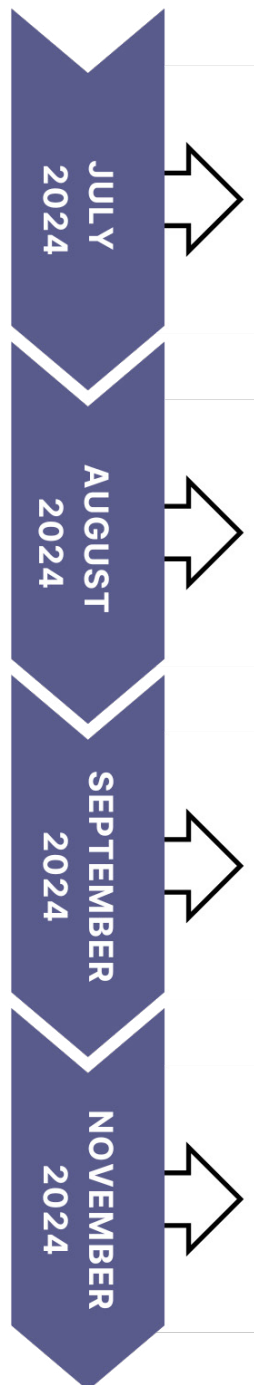
Dylan Owen
Statutory Director of Social Services

AN OVERVIEW OF THE PAST YEAR ...



AN OVERVIEW OF THE PAST YEAR ...

It's been a busy year and it's nice to be able to celebrate successes and recognise the hard work of the workforce:



GWYNEDD RECOGNISED AS AN AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITY

Confirmation was received from the World Health Organisation that Gwynedd had joined the Age-friendly Communities Network. Over 30 partners worked together on the application – a positive step towards a fair county for all. Read more about the scheme here: [Age-friendly Gwynedd](#)

WORKING TOGETHER TO KEEP COMMUNITIES SAFE

During the summer, Cyngor Gwynedd and North Wales Police worked with local communities to introduce Public Space Protection Orders in Caernarfon, Pwllheli and Cricieth. These orders give the police additional powers to deal with anti-social behaviour, helping to keep public spaces safe and welcoming.

THE NEXT STEP FOR PENRHOS NURSING HOME

Cyngor Gwynedd secured funding from the Welsh Government to move the Penrhos nursing home project forward. In partnership with Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board and ClwydAlyn, the development will offer 56 beds, including dementia care, and will create local jobs. It will also include low-carbon housing for people with care needs. The funding enables the development of a business case and detailed plan for the site.

THE LAUNCH OF THE GWYNEDD CARE ACADEMY

The Gwynedd Care Academy was launched at the beginning of winter. This is an innovative scheme that responds creatively to the challenge of recruitment in the care sector. The Academy offers clear career pathways, recognised qualifications and pay for those who wish to work in the sector. Read more on [page 9](#).



An artist's impression of the development of Penrhos (ClwydAlyn Photo)



It is important to ensure age-friendly communities

AN OVERVIEW OF THE PAST YEAR ...



PENSION CREDIT CLAIM CAMPAIGN

In light of the UK Government's decision to suspend Winter Fuel Payments, Cyngor Gwynedd worked with partners to encourage eligible residents to claim Pension Credit. Support was provided through community hubs, libraries and local events to help people with the application process.

COMMUNICATION BOARDS IN PLAY PARKS

The Council worked with the Health Board to install communication boards at several play parks across the county. These will support children and young people with communication needs, including individuals on the autistic spectrum, to express their wishes. The boards were installed by the Learning Disability Service in conjunction with the Council's Highways Department.



RECOGNISING THE CHALLENGES

While a great deal of positive work is being done, it is important to acknowledge the significant challenges facing social services – both nationally and here in Gwynedd. As mentioned earlier on page 3, dealing with the serious child abuse case has been one of the main challenges this year - but it hasn't been the only one:

FINANCIAL CHALLENGE AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

Like every other Local Authority in Wales, Cyngor Gwynedd faces increasing financial pressures, with the cost of providing social care increasing year on year. The **Llechen Lân Report** offered a clearer understanding of the challenges and costs for the coming decades.

Throughout this year, our adult services' provision has been reviewed, but decisive and swift action is needed to ensure sustainable services that can meet future needs.

INCREASE IN DEMAND ACROSS SERVICES

Since the pandemic, there has been a continued rise not only in the number of referrals, but also in the complexity of cases and the time needed to address them.

This is true of services for children, such as Derwen, to areas such as Mental Health.

The significant pressure this places on teams and individuals is fully recognised. Targeted work has begun on children's provision to ensure our services remain robust and sustainable in the years ahead.

LEADERSHIP STABILITY

Looking ahead, maintaining stable leadership is expected to be a key challenge in 2025/26, as the Head of Adult Services has announced plans to retire.

Establishing strong succession arrangements is essential to maintain momentum and support the ongoing confident development of services. This involves not only appointing new senior leaders but also nurturing future leaders at every level, ensuring organisational resilience and the ability to respond to emerging challenges.

CONTEXT: LEADERSHIP, WORKFORCE, AND FINANCE

Leadership

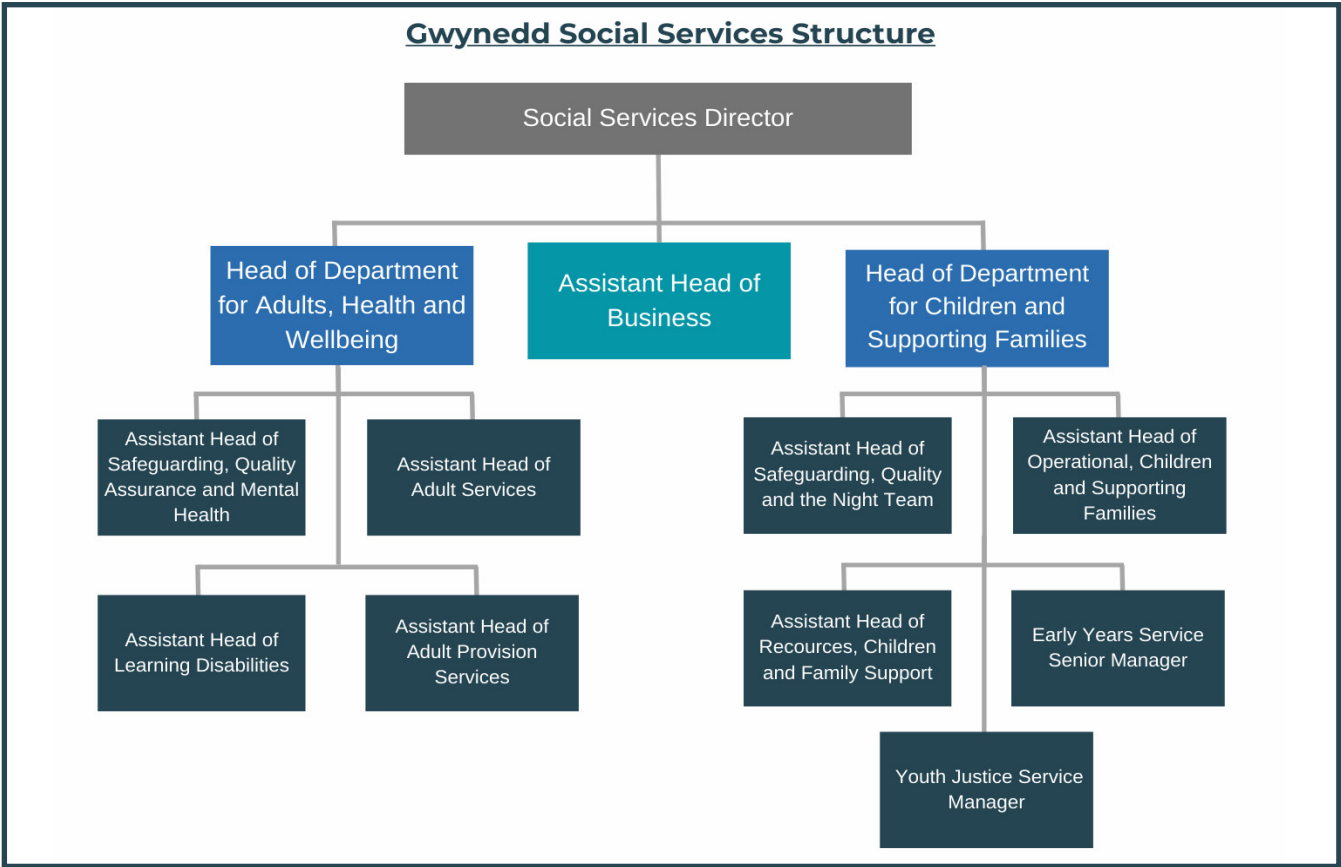
During 2024/25, the Director continued to hold bi-monthly meetings with the Heads of the Adult and Children’s Departments. These meetings were an opportunity to address areas such as the transfer of the existing Social Services data system, supporting young people in the transition to adult services, and the use of joint grant funding. Additionally, the Director held individual meetings with each of the Assistant Heads of social services.

A significant structural change occurred in May 2024, when the Social Services Business Unit, including the Commissioning Team, began reporting directly to the Director. The early feedback is positive, improving the support given across both departments. The long-term hope is to enable this service to develop further to ensure focus on effective and economical commissioning.

There has also been a political change, with the appointment of Councillor Nia Jeffreys as Leader on 5 December 2024, and the formation of a new Cabinet. Councillor Dilwyn Morgan retained his role as Adults’ Portfolio holder, while the Children Services Portfolio was transferred to Councillor Menna Trenholme, who is also the Council’s Deputy Leader. We thank former incumbent Councillor Elin Walker Jones for her dedication, and look forward to working closely with Councillor Trenholme, who has already started meeting with the Department’s teams.

The Head of Adult Services recently announced plans to retire in the summer of 2025. An early recruitment process was launched, with the new role now requiring a qualification in Social Work or Occupational Therapy, in line with our ongoing commitment to professionalism. Interviews are expected to take place in April 2025.

Management arrangements across the Services remain robust, supported by experienced Deputy Heads of Services. Two joint management sessions were held, including one with a guest speaker from *All Wales People First*. Positive feedback has been received, and it is intended to continue with this format to promote joint learning.



CONTEXT: LEADERSHIP, WORKFORCE, AND FINANCE

Governance, scrutiny and challenge arrangements

The Council's strategic objectives are reviewed annually with input from the Children and Adult Departments, ensuring that priorities are relevant and based on the need for services. These can be found in the [Council's Annual Plan](#).

Overall direction is set by the Leader and the Cabinet, with progress monitored through regular performance meetings with Cabinet Members, Heads and Assistant Heads of Departments and representation from the Care Scrutiny Committee.

The role of Scrutiny Committees is central to ensuring accountability. From May 2025, reports and performance dashboards will be submitted directly to the Care Scrutiny Committee instead of Cabinet meetings, to enhance transparency and encourage constructive challenge. The programme of the Scrutiny Committees is planned in advance to ensure timely discussion on key issues.

The workforce

Around **1,500 of the social care workforce are directly employed by Cyngor Gwynedd** – including social workers, domiciliary and care home staff, team managers, support workers and those in administrative roles. In addition, a number of services are commissioned from independent providers and third sector organisations, increasing the **total number of the workforce to about 3,000**.

This mixed model of in-house and commissioned delivery is central to the delivery approach in Gwynedd, reflecting the Welsh Government and Gwynedd Councillors' emphasis on not-for-profit care and a balanced market. Examples of clear progress in this area can be seen in Gwynedd – **with nearly 60% of domiciliary care now being provided either in-house or by third sector not-for-profit organisations**.

The dedication and resilience shown by the social care workforce across Gwynedd has been exceptional this year. Despite challenging circumstances, staff demonstrated a strong sense of pride in their work, and positive feedback was received from individuals and their families, underlining the value of the contribution made. Here are some comments received about the workforce during the year:

“ The (Social Worker) has been a constant and reliable source of support for my mother during my father's illness and placement at the nursing home. Her understanding, compassion, advice and intervention enabled our mother to manage the emotional and physical pressure his illness was having on her. ”

“ We've waited for someone like (Key Worker) to come and help and be able to talk and work with my daughter. She came in and they clicked straight away. She's been able to communicate with my daughter in a way that she understands. ”

“ The way the two (home carers) were with mum was amazing; both made sure that Mum was always put at the forefront and treated her as a person and not a task... as a result Mum had the opportunity to stay at home for as long as possible. ”

CONTEXT: LEADERSHIP, WORKFORCE, AND FINANCE

Recruitment challenges

However, the sector continues to face recruitment pressures, particularly in key roles such as children's social workers and domiciliary care workers. The challenges in Gwynedd, such as low wages, lack of recognition, and limited opportunities, [reflect the national picture](#).

Efforts have been made to address some of these challenges over the year. In June 2024 the new pay scale was introduced for social workers – one for newly qualified workers and another for leadership positions. This brings Gwynedd's offer on a more equal footing with the Health Board and other local authorities, aiming to improve staff retention and professional recognition.

Care Academy, work experience and workforce development

The Care Academy was launched in November 2024 to attract a new generation to the sector. It welcomes applications from individuals aged 17 and over, including those with no prior experience.

The first tranche received 38 applications, resulting in six appointments. All six are now in long-term placements across frontline services,

including care homes, learning disability services, and children's services. The initiative has already received national recognition, with a member of the team receiving the Outstanding Personal Contribution Award at the Careers Wales Valued Partners event in Cardiff — evidence of the impact of the programme.



In addition, during the 2024/25 academic year a **period of work experience was arranged for 130 individuals**. The Work Experience Scheme offers first-hand experience and a taste of working in a variety of services, including shadowing a social worker and occupational therapists.

The development of existing staff has also been supported: five members have embarked on career development programmes, including studying for a social work degree via the Open University, and a part-time occupational therapy degree through Wrexham University. This enables staff to build up higher skills and extend their contribution to the services.

Workforce well-being

In supporting staff more broadly, the use of the MEDRA Counselling Service across the Council has increased significantly over the last year – **from 157 users between April 2023 and March 2024 to 425 this year. Of the 425, 139 were members of the social services workforce.** As the Council strengthens the way it collects data, it will be possible to revise the figures when looking to the future. The results of the Llais Staff Survey reveal increased awareness of available support and a greater openness to discussing mental health. While this is encouraging, it highlights the continued need to support staff well-being. The Council continues to collaborate with *Canopi*, which offers specific support to care workers, enhancing the emotional and professional support that is available.

Although opportunities for the Director to visit teams for informal chats over a cup of tea have been limited this year, plans are in place to resume these visits during 2025/26. Meanwhile, the 'Ask the Director' process has continued to offer an anonymous platform for staff to raise concerns and get honest responses.

CONTEXT: LEADERSHIP, WORKFORCE, AND FINANCE

Financial resources

(NET) Budget

The 2024/25 revenue budget shows that Gwynedd's social services are responsible for a gross budget of **£141M**, underlining its role as the cornerstone of the local economy. However, it hasn't been an easy financial year. Managing the Adult

Children and Families

£23M

Adults

£81M

Services budget is challenging due to the increasing number of people requiring support and the rising costs of services like nursing care. However, planning the Children's Services budget can be even more difficult, as care for individual children can cost tens of thousands of pounds per week. This is a further incentive for the Council to develop its own services where possible, whether that's small homes for children within the county, or a nursing home in Llŷn.

The long-term needs of social service were considered, weighing up and measuring what was highlighted in the [Llechen Lân](#) report, and corporate bids for additional funding from the Council were made. New opportunities have been taken to develop services through national and regional grants. While these grants enable the creation of exciting new initiatives, they also present challenges, as the funding is typically short-term and can leave projects without support once the grant period ends.

Budgets under Pressure: Actions to Control Expenditure

By the end of the financial year the Adults Department was spending **£875k** above their budget and the Children Department spending **£3.8M** in addition. It is important to emphasise that this 'overspending' was not due to unnecessary expenses, but rather driven by essential needs, often in very challenging circumstances for the individuals involved.

Social services set out to try to reduce this financial pressure on the Council and to ensure that every penny spent was fit and appropriate. There was an example where that didn't work effectively and there was a lot of attention to domiciliary care overspending. An internal audit was commissioned, alongside a review by the Wales Audit Office, with both identifying better ways to secure value for money. In response, an operational group was established to tackle the issues in domiciliary care, and by the end of the financial year, significant improvements had been made, with promising prospects for the future (see **page 41** for further details).

To ensure the best use of available funding and achieve effective strategic planning, experts from the Welsh Local Government Association and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) were invited to conduct a peer review. The three specialists provided valuable insights and recommendations to support the service's planning for the coming year.

CareCubed









Commissioning care can be costly and there will often be tension between providers and the Council as commissioners due to financial considerations. During the year, Cyngor Gwynedd became the first authority in Wales to adopt the CareCubed system, aimed at making cost and fee agreements clearer, fairer, and more affordable. While some providers remain reluctant to engage openly, CareCubed has fostered a healthier dialogue with positive outcomes. Following a regional proposal by the Council, four counties across north Wales have now adopted the system.

PEOPLE

VOICE AND CONTROL

- *"All people are equal partners who have choice, voice and control over their lives and are able to achieve what matters to them."*
- *"Effective leadership is evident at all levels with a highly skilled well qualified and supported workforce working towards a shared vision."*

SNAPSHOT IN NUMBERS:

46  INDIVIDUALS WITH A LEARNING DISABILITY IN PAID WORK	97%  OF CASE CONFERENCES WHERE THE CHILD'S VOICE / OPINION WAS HEARD (Aged 5+)	NUMBER OF CHILDREN OPEN TO THE TROBWyNT TEAM DURING THE YEAR 208 	NUMBER RECEIVING A HOME CARE SERVICE (MARCH 2025) 831 
% RECEIVING SERVICE THROUGH DIRECT PAYMENTS (MARCH 2025) 17% 	NUMBER RECEIVING A TELECARE SERVICE (31.03.25) 1,528 	42  NUMBER OF ADULTS WHERE AN INDEPENDENT PROFESSIONAL ADVOCATE WAS PROVIDED	NUMBER WAITING OVER 28 DAYS FOR HOME CARE (MARCH 2025) 50 

THE DIFFERENCE MADE: BEDWYR'S STORY



This is Bedwyr. He is 23 years old, and lives alone in a flat with his small dog.



Bedwyr had a history of mental health problems and a profound lack of confidence.



Through a direct payments package he employed Robin as a personal assistant.



Together they set out to design and build a suitable wheelchair to go to the beach.



For the first time in years, Bedwyr could go to the beach with his dog.



Bedwyr and Robin continue to adapt the wheelchair - now it has space to hold a sun umbrella!

WHAT ARE WE DOING WELL?

SOCIAL SERVICES



An increase in the use of direct payments

There has been a consistent increase in the use of direct payments across the children and adult services this year. **By now 17% of residents receive service through direct payments.** Proactive promotional methods were developed, and prepaid cards and a virtual wallet were introduced to facilitate the process and enable easier management of accounts by users. Despite the overall progress, one complaint was received regarding a delay in providing direct payments, highlighting the ongoing need for improvement.

Work will continue with the social workers to clarify what is available and when it can be offered. Increasing use is key to facilitate independence, flexibility, reducing demand for domiciliary care, and reducing costs for the Council.

Promoting the Active Offer

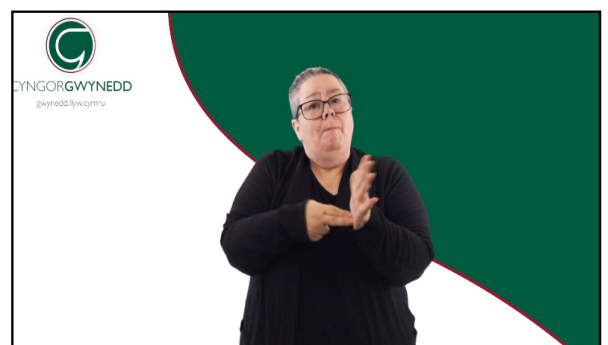
When receiving care or health services, communication in the individual's first language is not optional, it is essential. Through the Active Offer, services are provided in Welsh without the need to ask. The *More Than Just Words* Gwynedd group meets regularly, and, this year, has focused on raising awareness of the Active Offer among the workforce. A series of videos is planned for release in 2025/26 to further reinforce this message.

Gwynedd is seen as a positive example of working bilingually and of promoting good practice, further work needs to be done to ensure that all aspects of provision meet high bilingual standards and respond to the needs of everyone. The Director, who is a member of the Welsh Government's *More Than Just Words* Advisory Board, was appointed as Chair of the *More than Just Words Forum for North Wales*, with the aim of strengthening collaboration across the six counties and Health Boards.

New and exciting opportunities to use the Welsh language are seen through Artificial Intelligence (AI) developments such as Co-pilot.

A voice for all

Communication lies at the heart of social care - it underpins the ability to listen, understand, express, and connect effectively with others. In Gwynedd this means working daily through both Welsh and English, while third and fourth languages such as Makaton and British Sign Language (BSL) are also becoming increasingly prominent.



As well as providing communication boards in play parks across the county and in conjunction with the Health Board (see **page 6**), information on several of Cyngor Gwynedd's services (recycling, housing, parking (blue badges), working for the Council, and creating an online account) is now available via BSL videos on the Council's website. The Council partnered with the Centre for Sign Sight Sound to deliver this project, marking a significant step toward ensuring fairness and inclusion for all.

WHAT ARE WE DOING WELL?

ADULTS SERVICES

Innovation through technology

The **Llechen Lân report** highlighted that adult social services face extremely challenging years ahead. With rising demand for care and ongoing workforce shortages, innovative approaches to service delivery are essential. A key part of the solution lies in the use of Technology Enabled Care (TEC). This year, new robotics and telecare systems were trialled as part of this effort:

- The Lilli system - **Gwynedd is the first Local Authority in Wales** to pilot the technology, which monitors an individual's regular activity and alerts if there are changes to that activity. Early results are positive and offer peace of mind to individuals and their families.
- **Helpu'n Hun online self-assessment tool** ("Ask Sarah") – A virtual Occupational Therapist is now available on the Council's website, offering basic assessments and recommending next steps. Nearly 500 people have used the resource, reducing the need for face-to-face appointments.

The Business Service continually seeks opportunities to experiment and trial new approaches. By collaborating closely with the frontline workforce, the Council is well-positioned to harness advances in technology, robotics, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to benefit individuals and their families.

Learning Disability Service: expanding community and work opportunities

By building on existing community activities and actively listening to the voices of individuals with learning disabilities, the service support people to engage in local life — with notable successes including disco nights at a Bangor nightclub and a boccia championships.

The Learning Disability Career Pathway Co-ordinator operates across Gwynedd and Anglesey, with three Support Officers within the Service also focusing on promoting employment opportunities and supporting individuals towards paid employment.

There has been a significant increase in numbers with **114 now on the pathway to work** (compared to 51 in September 2023). In the same period, **the number in paid work doubled from 23 to 46**.

It is vital to continue to ensure that individuals on the programme are supported to progress towards paid work with fair pay, if that is their wish.



The Career Pathway Scheme is going from strength to strength

WHAT ARE WE DOING WELL?

CHILDRENS SERVICES

Gwynedd Youth Forum



Significant work has been carried out in collaboration with the Education Department to ensure the Council listens to the voices of Gwynedd's children and young people. Local and county youth forums have been successfully established, with plans to expand this work in the coming months. Their voices and priorities should be at the heart of council decisions, as they are the future of our communities. By encouraging democratic participation from a young age, they can be assured that they feel empowered to shape the world around them.

The Council commissions an independent advocacy service and enables a proactive offer for children to make use of the service. Some advocacy agencies carry statutory responsibilities, while others focus on supporting children to understand, express, and voice their opinions in difficult and complex situations. **Data shows that 97% of children's voices (5 years old +) were heard at child protection case conferences and every single young person who's left care has a personal advisor.**

Recognising that the current Child Practice Review may challenge existing approaches, it is expected that demand for advocacy services will grow, and the role of county forums will become increasingly important.

Corporate Parenting Panel

The Council is committed to the Welsh Government's Corporate Parenting Charter to ensure fair access to services for children and young people who have experienced care. The Charter is due to be formally presented to Cabinet in April 2025.

To strengthen the commitment to give a central place to the voice of the child and those who have experienced care, consideration will be given to inviting a foster parent or an individual with first-hand experience to join the Panel. It is strongly believed that lived experiences are essential in policy-making and strategic decision-making and the creation of services that are truly responsive and sensitive to the needs of those who have experienced care.

Teulu Gwynedd Podcasts

During the year, a series of Welsh-language podcasts were developed to support parents and carers with common childhood challenges. The first chapter focused on learning to use the toilet in a friendly way, with plans to discuss parental mental health and language development. [The podcast is available free on popular platforms such as YouTube, Spotify and Apple.](#)



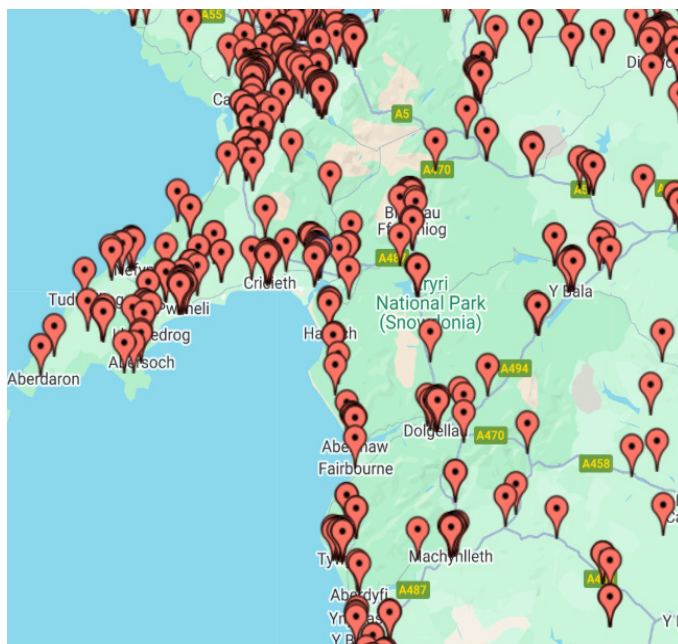
In response to comments and engagement talks, work was completed on re branding the Early Years Unit, now known as "Teulu Gwynedd". Promotional work is underway to ensure that the people of Gwynedd and stakeholders are aware of the change.

HOW WE CAN DO THINGS BETTER?

Dewis Cymru

In 2023/24, a project group was formed to increase the use of “Dewis Cymru” – a directory of local services and events that support self-help. Progress was seen, particularly in the pilot areas (Bangor and Dolgellau), but there were delays due to key staff absences in the second half of the year.

It is anticipated that additional resources will be needed over the next year to ensure consistent promotion and maintain the momentum, enabling the effective promotion of Dewis across Gwynedd.



From perception to action: pushing change faster



The core perception of [Llechen Lân](#) was that services for older people needed to be changed in a way that is radical and fast.

The report states that there is a need to:

- Develop suitable accommodation
- Make better use of direct payments
- Support community involvement
- Expand our use of robotics and technology
- Promote training opportunities and apprenticeships for Gwynedd's youth.

While progress has been made on some of these recommendations, the change is slow, and much faster action is needed to respond to the demographic challenges.

This is also a recommendation and conclusion following peer review by experts on behalf of the Welsh Local Government Association. (Further details on [page 41](#))

Among the positive signs is a significant reduction in waiting lists for domiciliary care – particularly in areas such as Tywyn and Harlech which faced critical problems in 2023/24.

However, the lists continue in other places. We should continue to push hard to tackle the delays in the delivery of care, with our commissioning methods and the advances of the Care Academy integral to the solution. When individuals' needs are identified, it is essential to be able to respond promptly and appropriately.

WHAT PROGRESS WAS MADE AGAINST LAST YEAR'S PROMISES?

Last year's promises	Progress
Look at what prevents workers from increasing their use of direct payments, offering them to individuals under their care.	
Make sure that we are aware of developments in the field of technology and robotics and can offer these as a solution to care needs.	
Develop and provide an occupational therapy tool service, ASK Sarah, so that it is available on the Council's website.	
Develop a directory of community-based activities for people of all ages through Dewis Cymru, starting with two pilot areas, Bangor and Dolgellau.	

2025/26 PROMISES

1. Reducing our waiting lists for new domiciliary care packages:

During the coming year, the aim will be to ensure that no person in Gwynedd waits more than 28 days following a care assessment. This requires working closely with care providers, improving commissioning arrangements, and reviewing internal processes in order to streamline workflow.

2. Developing our use of technology to support care and independence:

It is intended to assess the use of the Lili platform, promote the Telecare service, and explore the potential of robotics to enable people to live independently. Innovation is key in this area.

3. Child-friendly Gwynedd:

During the coming year UNICEF's "Child Friendly Cities" scheme will be looked at in more detail, fostering a culture of listening, involving and respecting children as full citizens and strengthening and developing the youth forums to give a stronger platform for young people's voices.

4. Adopting the Parenting Charter:

It is intended to officially adopt the Parenting Charter and work to strengthen the voice of children in care. This includes ensuring that their experiences and perspectives are taken into account in decision-making and developing new approaches to involve them in the policy-making and service-planning process.

5. Dewis Cymru:









It is intended to re-visit the resource needed to ensure that Dewis is accessible, is promoted across the county and meets the needs of residents effectively.

A full list of strategic priorities for next year can be found at: [A Caring Gwynedd](#)

PREVENTION

- *"The need for care and support is minimised and the escalation of need is prevented whilst ensuring that the best outcomes for people are achieved."*
- *"Resilience within communities is promoted and people are supported to fulfil their potential by actively supporting people who need care and/or support including carers to learn develop and participate in society."*

SNAPSHOT IN NUMBERS:

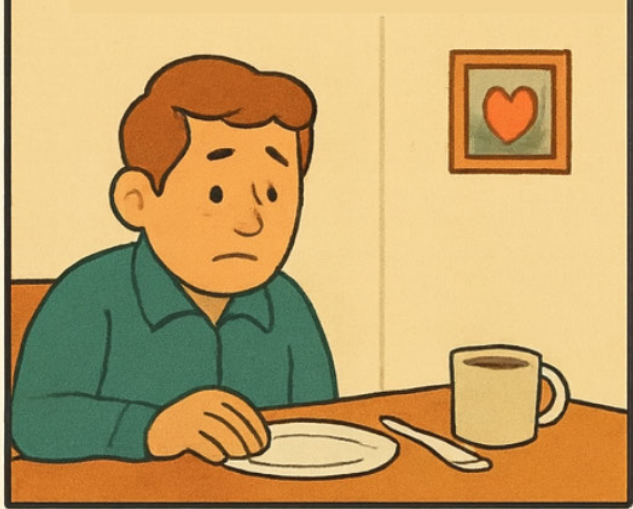
<p>NUMBER OF CARERS ASSESSED</p> <p>492</p> 	<p>294</p> <p>RECEIVED SUPPORT FROM DEMENTIA ACTIF</p> 	<p>NUMBER OF RE-ENABLEMENT PACKAGES COMPLETED DURING THE YEAR</p> <p>307</p> 	<p>NUMBER OF FOOD PACKAGES DISTRIBUTED BY COMMUNITY FOOD SCHEMES</p> <p>5,575 *</p> <p>* (Oct 24-Mar 25)</p> 
<p>163</p> <p>YOUNG CARERS RECEIVING SUPPORT</p> 	<p>9,420 *</p> <p>VISITS TO THE SUPPORTING PEOPLE HUBS</p> <p>*quarter 4 (Jan-Mar 25)</p> 	<p>149</p> <p>YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE CASELOAD</p> 	<p>£648,443</p> <p>DEBTS ELIMINATED THROUGH CITIZENS ADVICE</p> 

THE DIFFERENCE MADE: MEIC'S STORY

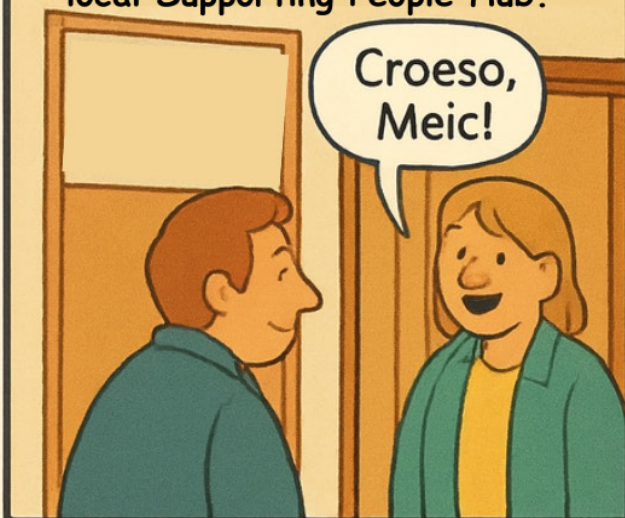
Meic lives alone in the countryside just outside Caernarfon.



Having lost his family, he experienced years of loneliness and social isolation.



But Meic's life changed for the better when he discovered the local Supporting People Hub.



He started attending Dementia Active sessions and weekly community dinners.



The hub has helped him make friends and feel that he belongs.



"I'm happier because I have something to get me out of the house more often... the hubs are important because they get people talking to each other; we all need that!"



WHAT ARE WE DOING WELL?

SOCIAL SERVICES

What is “prevention”?

While the term ‘prevention’ is central to the legislation, it prompts important questions—prevention of what, exactly, is the goal? Illness, loneliness, or the use of services? Often, ‘prevention’ is viewed as work focused on weaknesses, aimed at stopping negative outcomes before they occur.

The Council’s aim is to enable people to live the best possible life, within their communities, using public services only when needed. It is understood that not everyone has the same opportunities to enjoy life to the best of their ability and, therefore, it is vital that social services and the Local Authority provide support to try to alleviate these differences as much as possible.

Supporting people by maximising income

The Council’s Cabinet set a priority of helping people and tackling poverty and there has been significant use of the support hubs across the county. It is now understood that the challenge is not just the cost-of-living crisis, but the deeper, long-term poverty that affects the daily lives of people in Gwynedd and Wales.

Following the UK Government’s decision to suspend Winter Fuel Payments, the Council collaborated with partners to encourage eligible residents to claim Pension Credit—a benefit that can substantially boost income and unlock additional support. Practical assistance was offered through community hubs, libraries, and local events to make the application process accessible to all.

To strengthen the proactive response, investment was made in the Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) system. This will enable the Council to analyse and use data more effectively in 2025/26—identifying areas vulnerable to poverty, pinpointing households near the benefit threshold and engaging directly with those families to encourage them to claim their entitlements. Authorities in south Wales have already seen positive results from using the system, and it will be possible to measure its impact in Gwynedd in the coming year.

Over the coming year, the Council’s Working Group on Supporting People will bring together officers from across departments to develop new work streams – such as offering free swimming for children – as part of a broader commitment to support residents, improve financial well-being, and reduce the impact of poverty on the lives of people in Gwynedd.



Living Cost Support “Drop-In” session, Porthmadog Byw’n Iach Leisure Centre

WHAT ARE WE DOING WELL?

ADULTS SERVICES

Occupational Therapy: supporting independence and preventing long-term care

Securing the right support early is crucial to maintaining independence, preventing unnecessary hospital admissions, and reducing the need for long-term care. Occupational therapy plays a central role in prevention by assessing individuals' needs, recommending equipment or home modifications, and supporting recovery. This early intervention not only enhances quality of life but also eases pressure on hospital and residential care services. It helps people remain part of their communities for longer while providing vital support to carers.

There has been a significant reduction in the waiting list for an occupational therapy assessment over the year, **from 129 in June 2024 to 36 in March 2025**. Funding from the Welsh Government's '50 Day Challenge' grant contributed to the payment of private Occupational Therapists who addressed the waiting lists, mainly prioritising the Bangor and South Meirionnydd areas.

Earlier this year, the Service also used national funding to purchase specialist chairs for individuals with specific requirements, enabling many to remain independent in their homes and communities.

// Having a Careflex MultiAdjust chair has made a huge difference... He's able to sit out for most of the day and be a lot happier! The family notices a difference as well and that he is not sleeping as much in the day anymore. //

Dementia Actif Gwynedd

Through proactive services such as Dementia Actif, the Council can support people to stay fit, socialise and maintain independence. The service works with partners such as Age Cymru Gwynedd a Môn and Byw'n Iach centres to run events across the county.

The impact has been significant: **in March 2025, 294 individuals took part in activities – 64 living with dementia, 49 being unpaid carers, and a further 181 benefited socially**. This demonstrates the value of preventative services in assisting individuals to live independently, prevent loneliness and to support carers.

In addition, Dementia Friends sessions were held in nine schools to raise awareness, dispel myths, and to prepare pupils for the Boccia tournament in April.



Some of Dementia Actif Gwynedd's activities



WHAT ARE WE DOING WELL?

CHILDRENS SERVICES

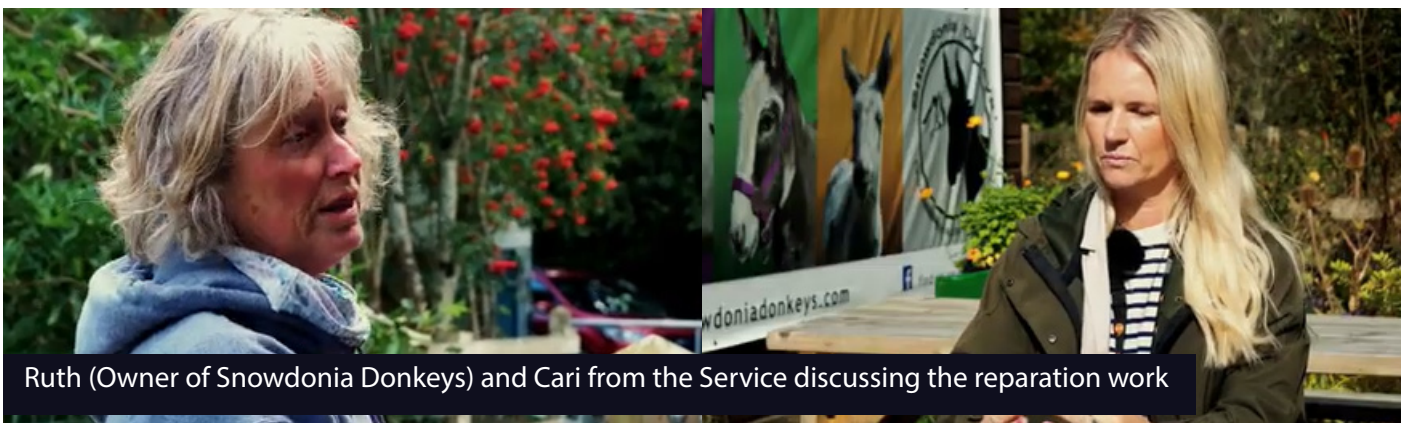
Youth Justice Service

A significant increase was seen in caseload numbers, with the service currently **managing 149 cases, which is a further increase of 17.3% since September 2024**. There has been a slight decrease in the number of women referred to the service. The Management Board continues to monitor Diversity and Protected Characteristics, with concern arising for children who are not in full-time education and who have emotional and mental health issues.

As part of the Youth Justice Service, the reparation programme offers young offenders the chance to give back to the community and develop life skills. Victims are invited to participate in the process if they wish. The programme works closely with local organisations, such as the Tregarth Donkey Sanctuary, to foster positive connections. Officers provide intensive one-to-one support to help young people understand the causes of their offending and prevent reoffending.

In last year's report, it was identified that 1 young person was in secured accommodation. This year (between April 2024 and March 2025) no other children from Gwynedd were sentenced or detained in custody.

Within the service, the Emrallt Team provides a multi-agency counselling service addressing harmful sexual behaviour. Emrallt remains the only team of its kind in Wales. Recently, at the [NOTA](#) annual international conference held in Belfast, the team was chosen to deliver a 90-minute workshop on the framing on shame, attracting over 300 attendees. The team received positive feedback, with attendees from the UK and abroad praising their expertise, motivation, and the opportunity to share experiences.



Ruth (Owner of Snowdonia Donkeys) and Cari from the Service discussing the reparation work

RAP (Repatriation and Prevention) Service

The RAP Service offers an intensive intervention to support parents and foster carers to manage challenging behaviour, ensuring stable placements and reducing the need to move a vulnerable child away from their home surroundings, friends and family. Without the proper support, such situations can quickly worsen, leading to placements breaking down and problems becoming more serious and difficult to solve.

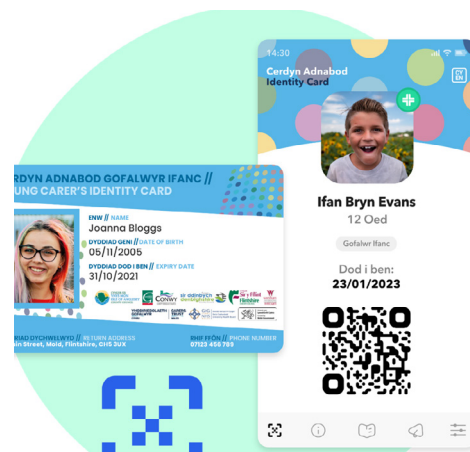
Due to previous experiences and trauma a relational therapeutic approach is adopted, based on trust and voluntary commitment. This is particularly important when supporting young people leaving care. It ensures that the support is not "forced", that the young person agrees and wants to participate. The process is led by the young person themselves and the work shows positive results.

HOW WE CAN DO THINGS BETTER?

Unpaid carers: strengthening core services

Research by Age Cymru shows that there are more than 370,000 unpaid carers in Wales, many of whom are unaware of the support that is available to them. The Older People's Commissioner for Wales has also highlighted their huge contribution – worth billions to the economy – but often at a significant cost to their own health and well-being.

While information sessions and community activities continue, and positive work is underway with young carers through a partnership with *Action for Children*, it is acknowledged that core services for unpaid carers are not as strong as they should be and require substantial improvement.



AIDI App gives support to Young Carers

A recent review by Care Inspectorate Wales found that challenges remain in collecting and recording data on assessments and support for carers ([see page 40](#)). It was not always clear whether all carers received appropriate assessments or if information about support was consistently documented. Improving this process is essential to meet statutory duties and to ensure that carers are referred effectively to suitable support – including third sector services – to prevent their needs from escalating. Since early 2025, efforts to improve the recording of assessments have made a noticeable impact, with data showing more than double the number of assessments completed in 2024/25 compared to 2023/24 (**492 compared to 255**).

Over the next year, there are plans to work regionally to develop an action plan to strengthen carer support. This will include building systems in partnership with the third sector to help unpaid carers plan ahead for emergencies or periods when they are unable to provide care.

Improving access: simplifying the front doors to social services

Accessing social services can be challenging for individuals and families reaching out for the first time. In these cases, simplicity is essential, ensuring that the “front doors”—the initial points of contact for referrals—are easy to navigate and provide a consistent experience for residents.

At the moment, the Adult Department has over twenty different access points. This can lead to complexity and inconsistency, so there is need for improvement. The intention is to remodel these arrangements, working together with Galw Gwynedd (the Council's Customer Contact Center) and the Health Board, in order to simplify the system and make more efficient use of the resources available.

Reaching out: Gafael Llaw pilot

As part of prevention efforts, offering support beyond traditional services plays a vital role in maintaining individuals' well-being. The Gafael Llaw pilot, funded through a grant, takes a personal and proactive approach by engaging older residents in well-being conversations. These discussions help guide individuals towards support that promotes a good quality of life, encourages community participation, and reduces the risk of future problems or crises.

The project initially offered well-being phone calls to those applying for a disabled parking badge, with plans to expand the initiative during 2025/26.

WHAT PROGRESS WAS MADE AGAINST LAST YEAR'S PROMISES?

Last year's promises	Progress
Undertake a full review of daycare services across the county.	
Do further work to ensure that the direct payment system is effective, accessible and easy to use by all.	
Further develop the offer to unpaid carers to ensure that all carers have the appropriate opportunities for work, leisure and training.	
Looking at establishing new hubs in the areas that remain unsupported.	

2025/26 PROMISES

1. Strengthening support for unpaid carers:

In 2025/26, the priority will be to identify unpaid carers early and provide them with comprehensive support to help them continue their role without compromising their own well-being. Plans include collaborating at a regional level to develop an action plan aimed at strengthening services and better meeting carers' needs.

2. Complete the work of looking at the "front doors":

It is intended to look again and simplify the "front doors" to create a consistent and simple experience for residents as they access social services, improving efficiency and accessibility.

3. Make use of the Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) system to proactively respond to cost-of-living challenges:

The LIFT system is used to identify individuals and families in need, support them to claim the benefits to which they are entitled, and offer further support to reduce the impact of poverty on the lives of the people of Gwynedd.

4. Supporting the hubs and a sustainable model:

While the main project milestones have been achieved, the 2025/26 intention is to review existing arrangements, creating a more sustainable and collaborative model with partners for the future.

A full list of strategic priorities for next year can be found at: [A Caring Gwynedd](#)



PARTNERSHIP AND INTEGRATION

- *“Effective partnerships are in place to commission and fully deliver fully integrated, high quality sustainable outcomes for people.”*
- *“People are encouraged to be involved in the design and delivery of their care and support as equal partners.”*

THE DIFFERENCE MADE: LISA AND CERY'S STORY

Lisa (aged 58) is in a residential home as she needs 24 hour care. Her wish is to live in her community.



Cerys (also 58) has moved temporarily to a residential home after spending months in hospital. She is vulnerable to external influence with a diagnosis of brain damage due to alcohol.



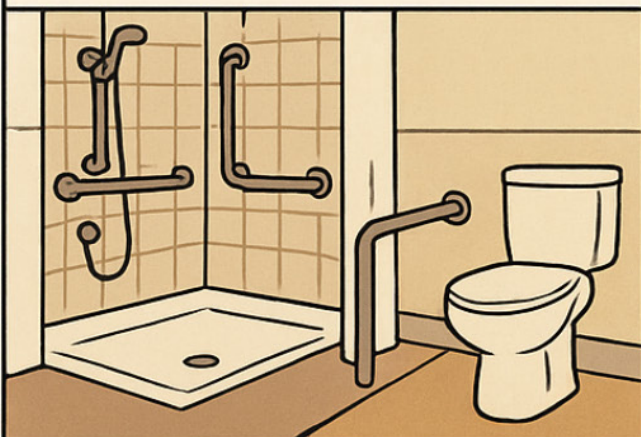
The residential homes are not suitable for either of them and both are unhappy.



Options were considered for the two to live together in a Tenancy Unit with support 24 hours a day.



Some modifications are needed to the bathroom so they can move in safely.



The flat will improve the quality of life for both, giving them more freedom, companionship and independence.



WHAT ARE WE DOING WELL?

SOCIAL SERVICES

New data system

Last year's report highlighted concerns about the social services data system– WCCIS (CareDirector) – as support for it is set to end in January 2026. Given that it is one of the service's most critical systems, this presents a significant risk.

Since then, the Business Service, the Corporate Procurement Team, the Information Technology Service and colleagues throughout North Wales have worked together and succeeded in reaching tendering stage within a very challenging timeframe. Confirmation of national funding for the Connecting Care programme is expected soon, but it's also essential to secure further funding for 2025/26 in order to undertake the transfer work.

The new system is expected to simplify record-keeping for staff and enhance communication with residents. Gwynedd will be the first county in North Wales to implement the change, with extensive preparation and workforce training planned over the coming year.

Reduction in anti-social behavior in Gwynedd

There was a **decrease of almost 9% in the number of incidents of anti-social behaviour** in Gwynedd in 2024/25 compared to the previous year – **which is over 150 fewer cases reported to the Police**. This shows that the stable partnership between the Council and the Police is working well and having a positive impact on communities.

However, some areas continue to face challenges with anti-social behaviour, prompting ongoing monitoring. Collaborative efforts with Town and Community Councils, the Highways Department, and the Police focus on installing CCTV cameras in locations where the need is greatest.

In addition, a new duty is in place throughout Wales, which requires organisations to work together to prevent and reduce serious violence. The Council collaborates with the Regional Steering Group and during 2024/25 £82,000 of funding was obtained to carry out preventive projects and early intervention with children and young people. This funding has, among other things, supported projects to challenge gender stereotypes and harmful masculine behavior among boys and young men, and also to raise awareness of sexual violence and promote consent and respect in relationships through sessions in schools.



Caernarfon is one town that has seen the benefit of a new CCTV system

WHAT ARE WE DOING WELL?

ADULTS SERVICES

Gwynedd and Môn Shared Lives Scheme

The Gwynedd and Anglesey Shared Lives Scheme is a special programme that connects people with care needs (such as older people, people with learning disabilities, or mental, physical or sensory health needs) with eligible individuals or families who have a place to welcome them. The Enablers offer accommodation, daily support, respite care or long-term provision in a homely and independent environment. Through the scheme, people are supported to live a meaningful life in a community, strengthening well-being and social connections.

During the year, two residents from Gwynedd, Catherine and Liz, were honoured as “Shared Lives Ambassadors” for their outstanding commitment. Both have been active members of the Scheme for twenty years, advocating its benefits across the United Kingdom. As Catherine’s quote highlights, they embody the importance of building strong, lasting relationships—truly reflecting the spirit of collaboration.

“ I love living with Liz. Sometimes we do things together or by myself – like gardening, I’ve got a dog, so taking him for a walk, shopping, going to the beach, just normal things... I can do the things I enjoy and have freedom to live the life I choose, not be told I must go to bed at a certain time every night, eat at the same time each day. This is family life and it’s perfect. ”

Collaboration with the Health Board

The Community Resource Teams (CRT) are made up of health, social care staff (social workers, occupational therapists and practitioners) and the third sector who work closely with local GP surgeries to provide integrated models of service for the benefit of the people of Gwynedd.

Research shows that co-locating teams improves practice, resulting in faster information-sharing, immediate problem-solving and offering more coordinated responses to meet individuals’ needs. In the Bangor, Eifionydd and Llŷn CRT area, Council employees in the Adults Department now share the same building or office as the health workforce, strengthening collaboration at an operational level. Further co-location arrangements have been established in sub-areas at Tywyn Hospital, Plas Pengwaith in Llanberis, The Old Clinic in Penygroes, and Blaenau Ffestiniog Medical Centre.

An improvement in the working relationship with hospital discharge teams was seen through the arrangement of a single point of contact and weekly meetings to discuss specific patients. This facilitates prioritisation of those who are medically ready to go home, and the local expertise of the CRT is used to provide the appropriate service. Whilst the limitations of the hospital’s patient data systems have caused obstacles, development work is underway to improve efficiency.

Although Gwynedd Council’s Home Care Medicine Policy has been a positive and decisive step to protect staff and home carers, there have been some difficulties in communicating with health teams. The need for further clarity during 2025/26 was highlighted.

At a strategic level, the CRT Board has continued to meet, with the appointment of a project manager enabling some work streams to move forward. The risk that changing personnel in the Health Board and Council can create uncertainty is recognised, but through regular meetings, strengthening the flow of communication and maintaining the partnership relationship, the integrated approach that is at the core of the CRT’s success can be safeguarded.

WHAT ARE WE DOING WELL?

CHILDRENS SERVICES

Response Plan Programme Board

Following horrific incidents of child abuse in Gwynedd, a Response Plan Programme Board was established to learn lessons and ensure specific and positive changes, focusing on partnership, openness and accountability.

In February 2025, Professor Sally Holland, a former Children's Commissioner, was appointed as the Independent Chair of the Board. The Board encourages collaboration between the Cabinet, Council officers, Ysgol Friars Management Team, and national bodies such as Estyn, Care Inspectorate Wales, the Office for the Children's Commissioner and the Welsh Government. By gathering evidence and sharing learning, the Board ensures the implementation of clear steps to protect Gwynedd children for the future.

Working together to improve services for disabled children in Gwynedd

At the beginning of the year, the Cabinet Member for Children's Services raised concerns about the waiting times for nursing and psychology assessments for children receiving service through the Derwen team. It became apparent that there were significant challenges facing children who needed a nursing assessment and had to wait up to two years for it. This will undoubtedly have a negative impact on the children and their families.

To address the situation, a number of positive steps have been taken. Discussions took place between the Council and the Health Board, and the Derwen Management Board was re-established. External research was commissioned to look at processes and eligibility criteria, review the service's approaches, and advise on effective intra-professional working. As part of the review feedback is collected from families, children, and staff to ensure that services are effective, flexible and focused on the needs of individuals.

The Council and health services have been open to sharing resources, making staff roles more flexible, and ensuring services are better suited to the needs of disabled children. The work has just started and it is recognised that urgent work is needed to reduce waiting lists and times during 2025/26.

On 31 March 2025, **509 children and young people were open to Derwen services**. It is also intended to carry out internal research to examine population trends, following the pattern of Llechen Lân in the Older Adults Services. The hope is to be able to answer the basic question: why has the number of disabled children and young people (including those with neurodevelopmental conditions) has increased, even as the number of births in Gwynedd since 2012 has decreased. That work will take place over the next year taking into account the capacity within social services and the Education Department (Additional Learning Needs) to meet current and future needs over the next twenty years.



HOW WE CAN DO THINGS BETTER?

Planning for the future: care needs accommodation

Although there has been good progress with Extra Care Housing schemes in some areas, such as the Penrhos site (Ardan Llŷn) and the Caernarfon area, the work of identifying suitable sites for the Dolgellau area has taken longer than expected. During 2025/26 a decision will need to be reached on the way forward for Extra Care Housing provision in the Dolgellau area.

Currently, there are fewer accommodation options available for some individuals who need care or support. It is recognised that strategic planning needs to be strengthened to identify care accommodation needs (including nursing homes, residential homes, Extra Care Housing, supported accommodation, supported housing, and adapted housing) over the coming decades. Therefore, during 2024/25, an internal group of officers from social services and Cyngor Gwynedd's Housing Department was brought together to address this.

As part of this process, it is planned to use an external company to research trends and identify which areas will need additional provision. It is hoped that the tender will be awarded and modelling work will begin in 2025/26, ensuring that the services are properly designed to meet current and future needs.



The need to strengthen third sector partnership arrangements

Collaboration with the third sector is vital if the Council is to use its resources effectively and ensure better outcomes for residents. Their valuable role in providing services that are people-centred is recognised.

Four workshops to strengthen partnerships with the third sector were held in autumn 2024, but the second half of the year was delayed due to other priorities. It is intended to resume the work soon, including the adoption of a new "Compact" to lay a clear foundation for the relationship. The intention is to establish principles of collaboration that emphasise openness, flexibility, involvement of organisations early in negotiations, and clear funding arrangements.

Parha'r cyfarfodydd rheolaidd gyda Mantell Gwynedd. Regular meetings with Mantell Gwynedd have continued. During 2025/26, we look forward to further collaboration through launching a pilot project "Cynllun Ffrindiau", which aims to reduce loneliness, strengthen community ties, and support individuals – including by providing practical support such as delivering medication where needed.

WHAT PROGRESS WAS MADE AGAINST LAST YEAR'S PROMISES?

Last year's promises	Progress
Work with other local authorities, the Regional Partnership Board, Digital Health and Care Wales (DHCW), and the Welsh Local Government Association to procure a new system for the collection and storage of social services data (WCCIS)	
Appoint, with the Health Board, a project manager to develop the Community Resource Teams.	
Continue to work with partners in the housing sector to expand the provision of extra care housing.	
Collaborate with Mantell Gwynedd in order to harmonize funding arrangements for the third sector.	
Look to invest in the Community Catalyst scheme to support the creation of more care micro-enterprises.	

2025/26 PROMISES

1. Transition to the new data system:

During 2025/26, the transition to the new data system will need to be completed, ensuring comprehensive training for the workforce.

2. Strengthen collaboration with the Health Board:

The focus next year will be on reviewing and improving the data systems that support hospital discharge, and continuing to build on the strong relationship as personnel changes take place at a strategic level. The aim is to strengthen communication with health teams - especially regarding the Council's Home Care Medicine Policy.

3. Review of Derwen Service arrangements:

The collaboration will continue to try to address waiting times for nursing and psychology assessments. It is intended to complete the research to understand the growth of the disabled children's population in order to ensure that Derwen and the Additional Learning Needs Services are suitable for future needs.

4. Complete a review of the Third Sector collaboration arrangements:

In 2025/26, the focus will be on re-engaging and strengthening partnerships with the third sector, including the adoption of a new Compact to establish a clear basis for collaboration. It is also intended to work together with Mantell Gwynedd on the "Cynllun Ffrindiau" Pilot.

5. Develop a Strategic Plan for Care Accommodation for the future:







External researchers will be commissioned to analyze trends and map the needs in terms of care accommodation. This will lay the basis for strategic planning in order to strengthen and meet the needs of the residents of Gwynedd.

A full list of strategic priorities for next year can be found at: [A Caring Gwynedd](#)

WELL-BEING

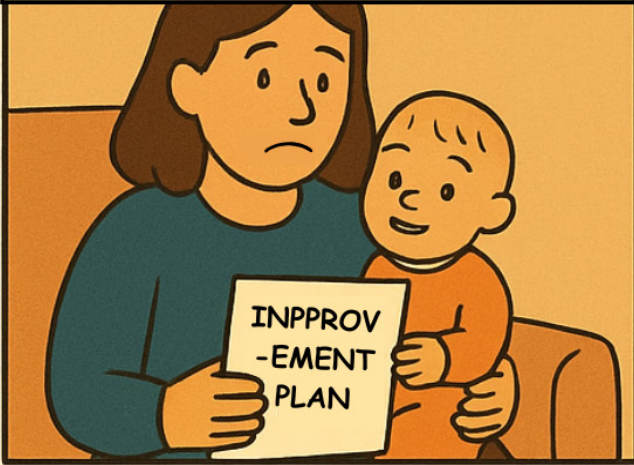
- *"People are protected and safeguarded from abuse and neglect and any other types of harm."*
- *"People are supported to actively manage their well-being and make their own decisions so that they are able to achieve their full potential and live independently for as long as possible."*

SNAPSHOT IN NUMBERS:

280 CHILDREN IN CARE 	82% OF CHILD PROTECTION REFERRALS THAT WERE RESPONDED TO WITHIN THE STATUTORY PERIOD	92% OF ADULT SAFEGUARDING REFERRALS RESPONDED TO WITHIN 7 DAYS	694 OF ADULTS HAVE RECEIVED ADVICE AND SUPPORT FROM THE STATUTORY SOCIAL SERVICES 
185 OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER PLACEMENT 	356 WAITING FOR A DOLS ASSESSMENT 	7,785 CHILDREN'S REFERRALS 	AUTISM TEAM: A NUMBER OF INQUIRIES FOR INFORMATION, ADVICE AND SUPPORT 267 

THE DIFFERENCE MADE: ENLLI'S STORY

Enlli is an autistic mother. Her child was on the protection register following several serious incidents.



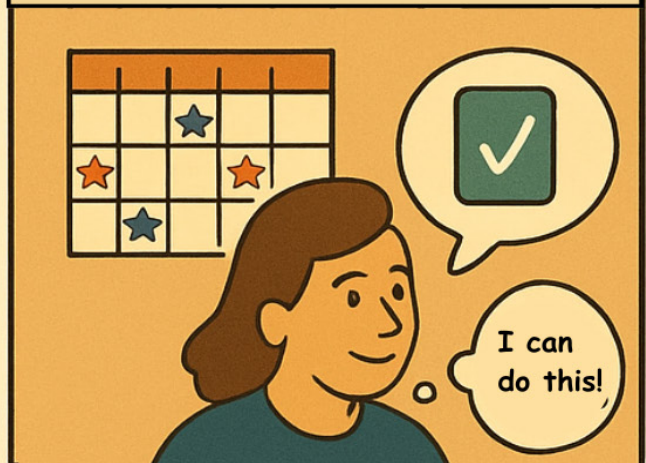
Concern was expressed about Enlli's understanding of the change needed. A referral was made to the Autism Team.



The team worked with Enlli to identify her strengths and help her understand when to ask for help.



Some strategies were used to support Enlli, such as introducing a calendar to help keep track of appointments.



Although new situations were a challenge, with help, Enlli was able to attend a local Mother & Baby Group.



Enlli and her daughter's situation is still improving with the support of several teams.



WHAT ARE WE DOING WELL?

SOCIAL SERVICES

Progress in support for autistic people and their families

The Gwynedd Autism Team was established to support autistic individuals – of all ages – and their families to live a full and fulfilling life. During the year, **the service received 267 enquiries for information, advice and assistance (IAA).**

To ensure fairness and wider access for more people of all ages, the focus of the service has shifted from providing individual expertise to offering training and guidance to professionals, particularly within social services and education. **Over 1,000 have now completed basic level training and almost 300 have completed the higher-level module.**

The service has also increased community opportunities through activities such as 'Paned a Sgwrs' for parents and carers, and the Neuro Club for young people. Autistic individuals – children, young people, adults, parents and carers – are integral to the development process, and a stakeholder group now meets quarterly. Feedback from individuals and parents shows the positive impact of the service, including personal development, confidence, and a better understanding of identity.

In February and March 2025, a Neuro Roadshow was held in partnership with Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board to raise awareness of services for neurodiverse families. The events included an information fair, workshops and sensory experiences. **566 people attended, with 38 local services present.** The roadshow was a success and an important step in improving access to specialist support in Gwynedd.

“ I've learnt a lot about myself since working with the team, I now understand my emotions and can control them, I've developed confidence to reconnect with old friends but more than anything I know now that I'm okay as I am, I don't need to hide or try to change for anyone, I understand the way I engage with the world around me. I'M BETTER THAN OK, I'M AWESOME! **”**



Cabinet Members, Cllr. Menna Trenholme and Cllr. Paul Rowlinson, with the Autism Team at the Neuro Roadshow

WHAT ARE WE DOING WELL?

ADULTS SERVICES

Establishment of a new Mental Health Service

The new Mental Health Service was launched in May 2024 and social work teams have now been established, with offices in Caernarfon and Penrhyn. While separating the service from the health element is contrary to the intention of integration, the decision was necessary in order to offer holistic and preventive support to individuals living with mental health problems. An improvement is seen in the exercise with workers providing mental health support within the community, focusing on responding to the needs of individuals and recovery.

Almost 400 referrals have been received since the new service was established. Close collaboration continues with the clinical mental health services. Weekly meetings are held with the Health Board, and support groups for individuals have been jointly developed in Arfon. Plans are underway to develop further groups in Nefyn and Dolgellau.

Appreciation of the employees of our Care Homes

During the year, the Director visited each of the Council's internal residential care homes. One message became apparent time and time again – that the well-being of residents is at the heart of the work undertaken. While the goal is always to enable people to live in their homes and communities for as long as possible, residential home remains an important option for some individuals.



There is room for improvement on the standards of the construction of our internal homes and it is intended to carry out work in the coming year with the Housing and Property Department (as stated on [page 30](#)) to consider what work each home needs and what the practical and financial implications would be of doing that recommended work. Ensuring suitable, safe and comfortable accommodation is essential for all residents. Below is a recent letter from one family attesting to the exceptional care provided in one of our homes:

“ On behalf of the whole family, we would like to thank the Plas Pengwaith Family for your special care of mum over the past four years.

Mum received the best possible warm, kind and Welsh care. I sometimes thought she was in a ‘Hotel’ and I’m not surprised! Also, she always praised the ‘girls’ and the food and there wasn’t usually much left on her plate I’m sure.

I remember someone calling sometime in November to ask for more skirts for her. We needed to buy new ones and I asked what size did she need?

“Twelve” someone said before immediately changing her mind and saying “No, it’s better to make it fourteen given that Christmas is approaching!”

Brilliant - mum loved fun and the humour and banter that was part of it really suited her...you can hold your heads high and be proud of the special service you provide to the elderly like mum (98) who was, at one time, many years ago, young and fit like you!



WHAT ARE WE DOING WELL?

CHILDRENS SERVICES

Fostering and adoption support

At the end of March 2025 there were 280 looked after children in Gwynedd, of whom 185 (66%) were in foster placements – most with Maethu Cymru Gwynedd carers

Invaluable support is provided by local foster families. Personal examples are seen that testify to the impact and show the true value and long-term influence of fostering on the lives of children and young people. [One young woman, Jenna, shared her experiences with Maethu Cymru recently.](#)

However, it is an ongoing challenge to attract enough new foster carers, particularly to look after teenagers and those with more complex and intense needs.

In order to address this, the Council hopes to introduce a comprehensive package of support for foster carers - including benefits such as Council Tax reduction and access to leisure services. The proposal will go to the Cabinet for a decision in April 2025.

“ My foster family meant everything to me, and they still do... There was a sense of belonging and they really wanted me, I'd never experienced that before. My foster carers chose to welcome me into their home and for me to be part of their family.

For the first time ever, I felt part of the family dynamic, this was something I had wanted all my life. Having parents who treated me like their daughter. Having relationships with siblings for the first time – although it wasn't long before we started fighting as siblings!

But it felt normal and natural. 'I was really happy. Happier than I'd ever been before

”

Developing Small Group Homes for looked after children

Developing residential provision for looked after children is central to the Welsh Government's vision of creating a not-for-profit model for children's services, and is a clear priority for Gwynedd Councillors, who want to see young people supported and housed locally, rather than being located far from the county.

Over the past year, significant progress has been made with the Small Group Homes Scheme, which is part of the Council Plan 2023–28. Three new properties were purchased in 2024/25, and the first home was opened in Morfa Bychan, with two children now living there. A manager and a full team of staff have been appointed, with the aim of completing the official registration process with Care Inspectorate Wales early in 2025/26.

In addition, a second home was purchased in Dinorwig and the necessary work is underway to prepare it for registration. A third home was also purchased in Edern, with children expected to move in over the next few months. Further steps are underway to explore opportunities in Arfon, including an option to develop on Council-owned land.



HOW WE CAN DO THINGS BETTER?

DoLS (DoLS) assessment waiting list

Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) is the legal mechanism to protect individuals without mental capacity, such as people with dementia or brain injuries, who receive care that limits their freedom — whether in care homes or in the community.

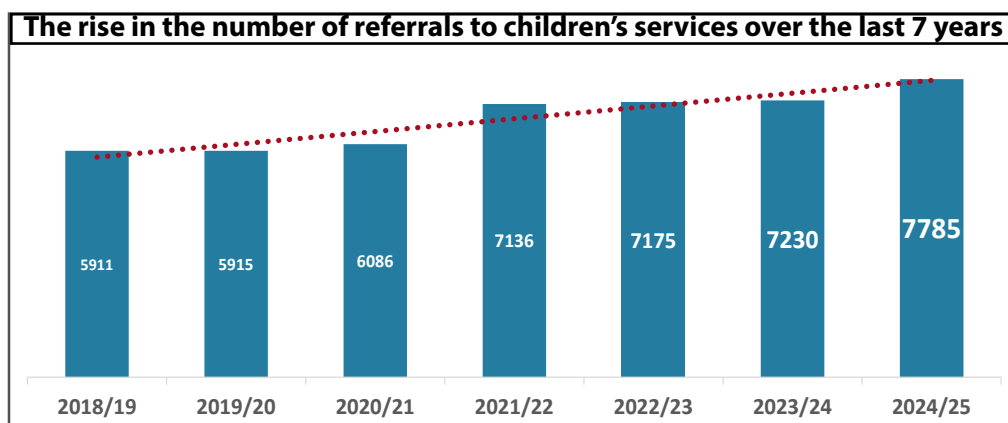
Cyngor Gwynedd faces a significant challenge to comply with the statutory duty to carry out DoLS Assessments within the 21-day time limit. Currently, **only 16 of the 67 monthly applications are completed promptly**, and due to a shortage of resources, emergencies and intensive cases in the community must be prioritised. The current arrangements are not sustainable, as each assessment takes at least 10 hours.

By the end of March 2025, **356 individuals were awaiting an assessment, with some having been on the list for over three years**. As a result, many people are deprived of their liberty without legal authority, a situation of serious concern to the council. Members of Cyngor Gwynedd's Care Scrutiny Committee expressed genuine concern about the situation in June 2024 ([see Item 7](#)), showing a reluctance to accept the corporate risk involved.

While the situation reflects a national challenge, ensuring the protection of the rights of the most vulnerable individuals is a key priority for the Council. In order to tackle the problem, a successful application for funds was made through the Council's corporate bid process and the Adults Department is now actively recruiting two additional Best Interest Assessors with the aim of reducing the waiting list during 2025/26.

A difficult year for the admissions team: high demand and case complexity

This has been the busiest year for the Children's Referrals Team since its establishment, **with almost 8,000 referrals – an increase of 5%** – with the complexity of cases putting significant pressure on an already stressed workforce.



As noted in the foreword ([page 3](#)) among the most serious issues was a public case of child abuse by a former headteacher - a case which highlighted serious failures over a period of a number of years. As a result, significant work was underway to review the Council's policies and arrangements, including the establishment of a Response Plan and Programme Board ([page 29](#)), strengthening our corporate safeguarding arrangements (see further details in the [Annual Report of the Strategic Safeguarding Panel](#)), commissioning several reviews, and collaborating with the statutory Child Practice Review (CPR) which is central to the lesson learning process.

We intend to act on all of the recommendations that derive from this review in a timely manner, ensuring positive change to protect the most vulnerable children in the county. Meanwhile, at the end of the year investment was secured to expand the workforce, recruiting additional staff to alleviate the pressures and strengthen the service's response to growing demand.

WHAT PROGRESS WAS MADE AGAINST LAST YEAR'S PROMISES?

Last year's promises	Progress
Implement the Gwynedd and Mon Youth Justice Service Improvement Plan.	
Launch of the new Mental Health Service in May 2024.	
Appoint a contractor in order to start the construction work on the new Dolfeurig Center in Dolgellau.	
Open the first Small Group Home in the county, and look to develop more similar homes.	

2025/26 PROMISES

1. Implementing the recommendations of the Child Practice Review (CPR):

The Council will implement all of the recommendations arising from the statutory Child Practice Review, ensuring that the lessons learnt from the serious abuse case lead to significant improvements to Gwynedd's safeguarding arrangements. These improvements will be central to the 2025/26 work.

2. Continuing to develop Small Group Homes:

The Council will complete the preparation and opening of two additional homes in Dinorwig and Edern, extending the capacity to offer local residential care for children with complex needs. These homes will provide a stable and supportive environment, avoiding the need to move children to remote locations and maintain their connection to their local community.

3. Tackling the DoLS Assessments waiting list to reduce risk:

Two new Best Interest Assessors will be recruited to help reduce the backlog of DoLS assessments in order to protect the rights of vulnerable people.

4. Scheme to adapt and improve the county's residential homes:

The Council will develop a strategic plan to maintain and upgrade the standards of our residential care homes, ensuring warm, safe and respectful environments for residents. The costs of the improvements are highlighted in this Plan.

A full list of strategic priorities for next year can be found at: [A Caring Gwynedd](#)



FURTHER INFORMATION

FURTHER INFORMATION

Inspections by Regulators

The close relationship between Cyngor Gwynedd and Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW), Estyn and Audit Wales continued throughout 2024/25. An annual workshop was held as usual with representatives of the main audit organisations, continuously strengthening the approach to reviewing and assessing services. Over the past year the Adults Department and the Children Department have been the subject of several external audits:

CARE INSPECTORATE WALES



- **Improvement Check - Adult Services**

A visit was held in October 2024 to assess the progress since the Performance Evaluation Inspection in 2022. It was noted that the service has an experienced leadership team and a clear vision, and that employees feel they are supported. Initiatives such as the Care Academy were praised.

However, concerns remain about waiting times for care and support as well as a lack of support for unpaid carers ([see page 23](#)). In some cases, the records failed to show that people had received relevant information or had been offered options such as direct payments. Improvements are already underway in these areas.

See the full report here: [Improvement Check: Gwynedd Adults Services](#)

- **Home Care Services – Older people, Assisted Living and Derwen**

There was positive feedback from individuals and their families about the quality of care and support received. It was noted that strong relationships had developed between staff and the people receiving service, with the provision responding to their wishes. However, there is a need to improve the concentration of information in personal care plans and ensure complete training records for staff. The Services are working on this.

AUDIT WALES



- **Home Care Audit**

The audit focused on the financial and performance aspects of commissioned home care services, noting that some providers had not fully delivered the contracted service and that problems had not been resolved in a timely manner. This had led to the loss of opportunities to support more people and reduce waiting times for domiciliary care.

See the full report and the Council's response to it: [Governance and Audit Committee \(Item 18\)](#)

Prior to the review, problems in contract monitoring and financial administration were identified with a lack of accountability. The Council's Internal Audit Service began looking at the arrangements, and urgent measures were put in place. The Project Board is now addressing these issues in collaboration with the Finance Department, ensuring consistency and systematic monitoring for "block hours". As a result the waiting lists are already starting to decrease and this is expected to continue in 2025/26.

See Internal Audit Report: [Governance and Audit Committee \(Item 10\)](#)

FURTHER INFORMATION

Other Reviews

- Peer Review of Social Services for Adults**

During the year, a review was carried out by two Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) experts of adults social services in Gwynedd. The aim of the review was to offer constructive support to the Council, focusing on the strategic level rather than the details of services.

The review found that Gwynedd is committed to supporting vulnerable adults and shows solid leadership to steer the change, with the Llechen Lân research receiving praise. However, the need to speed up implementation and develop clear action plans with specific targets and timetables was emphasised. It was also suggested that a robust commissioning strategy was needed, and to strengthen the collaboration between social services, the Finance Department, the Health Board, the voluntary sector and the third sector.

In addition, difficulties in maintaining services within the budget were highlighted, raising concerns about long-term financial sustainability. At a corporate level, **CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Finance and Public Accounting)** was also commissioned to carry out an independent review of the Council's financial position as part of its strategic response to ensure medium and long term sustainability.

- Extended Child Practice Review (CPR)**

Following the completion of the criminal process in relation to the actions of the former headteacher of Ysgol Friars, an Extended Child Practice Review was commissioned by the North Wales Safeguarding Children Board. The review process began in August 2024.

The review team was led by Jan Pickles OBE as independent chair, alongside two reviewers with significant experience in education and child protection. The team is completely independent, with no professional or practical contact with the local organisations involved in the case.

It is anticipated that the final report will be published in September 2025. The Council will respond to each of its recommendations. See the Terms of Reference here: **Terms of Reference**

Complaints and comments

Although the Services constantly strive to provide care of the highest standard, it is inevitable that there will be occasions where things go wrong. The statutory complaints procedure offers a formal way for individuals to voice concerns, enabling the Departments to learn lessons and avoid repeating mistakes.

During 2024/25, a total of 28 formal complaints were received which went through Stage 1 of the Complaints Procedure. Encouragingly, only 3 complaints progressed to Stage 2 (compared to 6 complaints in 2023/24), and no complaints were referred to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. This reflects the proactive approach to addressing concerns early and effectively, including close collaboration between the Customer Care Officers, service teams, managers and the Legal Service.

	Stage 1 Formal Complaint	Stage 2 Complaint	Corporate Complaint	Ombudsman
Adults	16	0	7	0
Children	22	3	-	0

FURTHER INFORMATION

Theme or patterns of complaints

In terms of the themes of the complaints received this year, a significant reduction in the number of complaints was noted in an area that had been the subject of obvious concern in the past - namely concerns about the lack of provision of home care hours. Two complaints relating to this area alone were received this year, compared to higher levels in previous years.

Due to the nature of the Children and Family Support Department's work, tension or conflict with families is unfortunately inevitable at times. Social Workers have to make very difficult decisions, and families are not always happy. The Department understands and accepts that families can be dissatisfied which leads them to make a formal complaint. Unfortunately there are cases where the Department has to use the "Vexatious Complainant" procedure with some individuals behaving in an increasingly aggressive or threatening way, with occasional cases where the Health and Safety Corporate Service had to be called in order to protect members of staff. This is not acceptable or fair on individuals.

The Departments have not identified any specific new trends during 2024/25, but the monitoring of the types of complaints received continues as part of the process of continuous improvement.

The process of learning lessons is central to the complaints procedure, with each case being reviewed by the Departmental Management Teams to ensure that appropriate action is taken in a timely manner. One key lesson is the importance of clear communication with service users and families, as well as ensuring that staff understand the complaints procedure and their responsibilities within it.

The full Annual Complaints Report will be presented to the Care Scrutiny Committee in September 2025 and made available to the public via the Council's website, as part of our commitment to transparency and accountability. See the full complaints report here: [Yearly Complaints Report](#)

Links to further information

This last section lists places to get more information about some of the things mentioned in this report.

- [Cyngor Gwynedd Plan 2023-28](#)
- [Cyngor Gwynedd Performance Report](#)
- [Compliments and Complaints procedure](#)
- [Gwynedd and Anglesey Community Safety Partnership](#)
- [Care Scrutiny Committee](#)
- [North Wales Regional Partnership Board](#)
- [North Wales Population Needs Assessment](#)
- [Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Service Board Well-being Plan](#)
- [Care Inspectorate Wales](#)
- [Dewis Cymru](#)
- [Helpu'n Hun Online Assessment Tool](#)