

**Minutes of the Meeting of OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE
held at the Neuadd Cyngor Ceredigion, Penmorfa, Aberaeron / remotely via video
conference on Thursday, 5 March 2026**

PRESENT: Councillor Wyn Evans (Chairman), Councillor Keith Evans (Vice-chair)
Councillors Marc Davies, Amanda Edwards, Elaine Evans, Gwyn Wigley Evans,
Rhodri Evans, Chris James, Ceris Jones and Caryl Roberts.

CABINET MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor Matthew Vaux, Cabinet Member for
Partnerships, Housing, Legal and Governance and Public Protection; Councillor Alun
Williams, Cabinet Member for Through Age and Wellbeing; Councillor M.S. Davies,
Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Customer Services; Councillor Gareth
Davies, Cabinet Member for Finance and Procurement Services.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Duncan Hall, Corporate Lead Officer, Finance and
Procurement and Section 151 Officer; Lowri Edwards, Corporate Lead Officer,
Democratic Services; Timothy Bray, Partnerships & Civil Contingencies Manager,
Policy, Performance and Public Protection; Diana Davies, Corporate Manager,
Policy, Performance and Public Protection; Elizabeth Upcott, Corporate Manager,
Quality Assurance and Safeguarding; Katy Sinnott-Jones, Governance Officer, Legal
and Governance Services; Emma Parry-Jones, Standards and Scrutiny Officer;
Dwynwen Jones, Overview and Scrutiny Officer, and Translators.

ALSO PRESENT:

Other Members: Councillor Gareth Lloyd and Hazel Lloyd-Lubran.

(10am – 12:30pm)

1 Apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.
Elin Prysor apologised for their inability to attend the meeting.

2 Disclosures of Personal Interest (including whipping declarations)

Councillor Rhodri Evans declared a personal interest to item 4.

3 Chair Announcements

None

4 Public Service Board Minutes

The Chair welcomed Hazel Lloyd-Lubran, Chair of the Public Services Board
and CEO of CAVO, Timothy Bray, Partnership and Civil Contingencies
Manager and Diana Davies, Corporate Manager, Partnership and
Performance.

The draft minutes of the Ceredigion PSB meeting held on 1st December
2025 and the draft minutes held 9th February 2026 were presented to the
Committee.

Work is underway to align activity with the Carmarthenshire PSB. A joint Assessment of Local Well-being is being developed for both counties, and delivery on current Local Well-being Plans will be reviewed and a light-touch plan will be put in place for the first 18 months of the new merged Board until the publication of the next full Local Well-being Plan that's due in 2028.

Recent work has concentrated on the economy and on taking a whole-system approach to healthy weight. A workshop was held in Carmarthen on 4th March, and the PSB will now consider what actions can be taken to improve people's access to good, nutritious food. This includes exploring ways to increase opportunities for people to buy healthy food locally.

A further meeting is scheduled later this month. The aim is to work collectively to develop a food strategy. The strategy will be shaped by these discussions, and it will be important that we follow through with effective implementation.

Members thanked officers for their work. It was noted that the Pembrokeshire PSB had chosen not to merge with Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire, and clarification was sought on whether meetings had begun and when implementation was expected. It was confirmed that a timetable is in place, with work on merging with Carmarthenshire already underway and the first meeting planned for September. The merged Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion PSB will also be working with Powys and Pembrokeshire PSBs as part of the wider process.

Further clarification was requested on the difference between merging and collaborating, and whether a wider Dyfed footprint was being considered. It was acknowledged that the structural changes represent a significant undertaking for the PSB. Officers explained that two counties are currently progressing with the merger and working through the detailed implications, including identifying shared projects and areas of common interest. Some work may also align with neighbouring counties where appropriate. Sub-groups have been established to look at Governance and Reporting and for the preparing the joint Assessment of Local Well-being.

An update was provided on the PSB's Assessment of Local Well-being, which is undertaken every five years to analyse data across the area and incorporate engagement and consultation findings. Officers will continue preparatory work ahead of the next meeting in April, including deep-dive sessions on key topics.

Recent discussions have included the Welsh language and climate change, with the climate group expected to report back in April with the recommendations from the climate change assessment. Concerns were raised about whether the collaboration might affect ongoing projects and about the clarity of boundaries within the wider regional structure. It was acknowledged that governance arrangements across regional bodies are complex, and that it is essential to maintain a clear shared vision and ensure work is aligned appropriately without duplication.

An update was provided on the reporting group established to ensure that no work is lost during the merging process. A work programme has been prepared and is ready for implementation, allowing progress to continue between now and September. Any effective practice identified in Ceredigion will be shared more widely.

A concern was raised regarding the attendance of Welsh Government officers at meetings, noting previous difficulties and questioning whether this would improve given changes in Cardiff. It was emphasised that their attendance is important to ensure clear communication and understanding of Welsh Government priorities.

It was confirmed that Welsh Government has committed to ensuring that senior officers will be more operationally involved and more visible across all PSBs, with a named contact to be confirmed shortly.

Following a discussion, it was **RESOLVED** to accept the draft minutes of the Ceredigion PSB meeting held on 1st December 2025 and 9th February 2026.

5 Oversight in year financial matters

Councillor Gareth Davies, Cabinet Member for Finance and Procurement presented the report to the Committee, At the quarter 3 point in the year, a broadly breakeven position is forecast on the Controllable Budget for the year, with a small projected underspend of £107k showing (0.05% of the 25/26 Budget).

Duncan Hall, Executive Corporate Lead Officer for Finance and Procurement and Section 151 Officer provided an overview of the main areas of significant cost pressures and risks. As at Quarter 3, there were 21 residential placements, 8 college placements and 2 placements within the new in-county facilities. Projected expenditure for the year is £9.28m for out-of-county placements and £0.67m for in-county placements, against a combined budget of £9.1m across Porth Gofal and the Leadership Group, with both budgets now managed jointly. The continued reliance on agency staff within Social Care was highlighted, driven by ongoing recruitment challenges. During Quarter 3, agency costs in Residential Care Homes averaged approximately £21k per week, with usage now almost exclusively limited to one home, and only exceptional use in others. Agency staff are also being used in Planned Care, Occupational Therapy and the Porth Gofal Triage Team. A net cost of £0.75m is included within Porth Cynnal projections (after assumed use of reserves) and £0.16m within Porth Gofal projections (excluding Residential Care Homes). As at 31 December 2025, this related to 25 agency roles in Porth Cynnal and 6 in Porth Gofal.

With the increases to Council Tax premiums for long-term empty properties and second homes effective from 1 April 2024, and the further increase to the second homes premium from 1 April 2025, the position continues to be closely monitored to identify any emerging trends. There remains a significant reduction in the number of Long-Term Empty Properties over five years old, and there are now clearer signs of a downward movement in the number of Second Homes. However, just over 100 premium-related properties are currently with the Valuation Office Agency, where Council Tax

bands have been temporarily removed pending review or re-assessment—for example, where a property moves from Business Rates to Council Tax after failing to meet the 182-day letting requirement for self-catering classification. These reviews and re-assessments are currently taking between six and eight months to conclude.

A small underspend of £107k was reported. Attention was drawn to potential impacts arising from instability in the Middle East, particularly in relation to energy contracts for gas, oil and fuel. It was noted that the risks are well understood and are being closely monitored, with a watching brief maintained to avoid purchasing fuel during periods of high prices. Fleet fuel deliveries are scheduled at the beginning of each week, and a briefing paper will be provided to Cabinet. The Council currently spends approximately £50k per year on heating oil. An update was also provided on capital receipts as at the end of December, including the sale of two schools, with the final capital position expected to be confirmed at year end.

Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions which were answered by Duncan Hall and Councillor Gareth Davies. The main points raised were as follows:

A query was raised regarding the work on separating collection rates for long-term empty properties. Reference was made to the current 88.6% collection rate, and clarification was sought on expected collection levels for properties without premiums. It was confirmed that the rate would not be expected to fall below 96%. Work is ongoing with the legal team, including securing agreements that ensure arrears are paid on completion of property sales. A more targeted approach is being developed for premium properties, including the potential use of enforcement measures.

Further questions were raised about council tax collection more broadly, including whether there had been an increase in calls from residents seeking support and whether the slight reduction in collection rates reflected wider financial pressures. It was noted that the service continues to collect debt from previous years, with write-offs being rare. No significant issues have been identified in relation to core council tax collection. Clarification was sought on the financial impact of a 1% change in the collection rate; it was confirmed that 1% equates to approximately £600,000.

A question was raised regarding the use of agency staff and whether this was limited to a specific service area. Clarification was provided that the use of agency staff in care settings is almost entirely limited to Hafan y Wayn, with only occasional use elsewhere.

It was noted that vehicles are either part-exchanged or sent to auction within Highways and Environmental Services. A corporate approach is taken to fleet management, with the fleet replacement programme retained as a central funding scheme rather than being ring-fenced. Fleet requirements can vary throughout the year, and the Council continues to purchase second-hand, low-mileage vehicles where appropriate to ensure value for money.

A query was raised regarding delays within the Valuation Office and whether scenarios extending beyond eight months had been considered, along with questions about the proportion of agency staff covering statutory roles and the actions being taken to mitigate overspends on placements and expand

in-house provision. It was confirmed that a backlog of six to eight months is typical, with occasional cases taking longer. Agency staff currently cover all frontline statutory social worker roles due to ongoing recruitment challenges, as maintaining appropriate staffing levels is essential. Updates were provided on in-county placements, including two placements in one setting and a further placement in another, with a third recently added. While additional placements are not expected to deliver significant financial savings, they are considered to provide the best outcomes for children. A query was raised regarding the underspend within Highways. It was explained that the position relates to the capital programme, with ongoing work to improve road structures supported by local government borrowing and Welsh Government-prioritised funding. The Council has contributed £2.1m of its own core funding and has spent as much as possible within the available allocations, having asked Welsh Government whether any additional funding could be provided, which was not available. An adjustment will be made before year end. Reference was made to flooding issues and works in Borth, and clarification was provided that shingle management at Aberaeron Harbour is treated as a revenue cost. It was AGREED to note the report.

6 RIPA

Councillor Matthew Vaux, Cabinet Member for Partnerships, Housing, Legal and Governance and Public Protection presented the report to the Committee noting there has been no RIPA activity by any service of the Council during the period between the 16th September 2025 and 16th February 2026.

The RIPA Policy was last reviewed by the Committee on 22 October 2025 and subsequently approved by Council on 27 November 2025. The Policy is scheduled for review in October 2026 and will be brought back to the Committee.

The most recent RIPA training session took place on 16 October 2025 for Authorising Officers, with six officers in attendance, including the four designated Authorising Officers, the Senior Responsible Officer and the RIPA Coordinator. The next training session for officers involved in surveillance work is scheduled for 15 May 2026. In addition, a new RIPA e-learning module is being developed with the Learning and Development Team and will be made available to all employees. Progress on this work will be reported to Scrutiny in the next update.

A query was raised regarding the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office (IPCO) Annual Report, specifically whether it applied UK-wide and whether it confirmed that all inspections had been completed with no issues identified. It was explained that the report is UK-wide and that all inspections referenced within it have been carried out, with the findings published on the IPCO website. Further clarification will be sought and an update provided to members.

A member raised a query regarding the Council's recent decision to permit the use of drones and whether all such activity falls within the scope of RIPA. It was confirmed that the use of drones does not fall under RIPA requirements. This had been discussed with the relevant officers during meetings held last year.

A suggestion was made that an e-learning module would also be useful for elected members as part of their training.

7 **CYSUR/CWMPAS**

Councillor Alun Williams, Cabinet Member for Through Age Wellbeing presented the report to the Committee. The key points were as follows:

- The number of contacts/referrals that proceeded into Child Protection Procedures, into an Initial Child Protection Strategy Discussion was 167-which is slightly increased from the previous quarter but is a marked decrease from the previous quarters.
- There were 1176 contacts/referrals in all this quarter compared to 1186 contacts/referrals in Quarter 1.
- In this quarter, 14.2% went to a Strategy Discussion (relating to 249 children), 7.7% went to a S47 Enquiry and 0.8% went to an Initial Child Protection Conference (this relates to 16 children). In Q1 13.8% went to a Strategy Discussion stage, 5.1% went to a S47 enquiries and 0.9% went to an Initial Child Protection Conference.
- In this quarter, 16 children were subject to an Initial Child Protection Conferences compared to 17 children in Q1 and this is a marked decrease from previous quarters.
- 16 children were placed on the Child Protection register.
- There were 17 children removed from the register compared to 33 in the last quarter.
- The Police followed by Education were the highest source of referrals.
- There were 90 Section 47 Enquiries undertaken this quarter, 73 undertaken jointly with the Police and 17 as a single agency compared to 60 S47s undertaken in Q1.
- The main concerns that led to completing child protection enquiries in quarter 2 were allegations of physical abuse, sexual abuse/exploitation and neglect.
- 86.7% of Initial Child Protection Conferences took place within the 15 day timescales compared to 58.8% in Q1 and the information shows that this has been a great improvement from previous quarters.
- 100% of Core Group meetings were held in the 10 day timescale following the Initial Child Protection Conferences.
- 96.3% of Review Child Protection conferences were held in timescales.
- Domestic abuse, parental substance misuse, and parental separation were the main risk factors for children who were on the register at the end of Q2.
- 31 children were on the register as at the end of Q2 compared to 32 at the end of Q1.
- As at the end of Q2, there was 1 child who was on the register for over 2 yrs, 4 children on the register between 1-2 years.
- Neglect was the highest category of abuse for children to be registered (20), physical abuse (6), emotional/psychological abuse (4) and 1 for sexual abuse.
- 46 cases were discussed in Strategy Meetings; 61 meetings were held in all. 10 cases related to child exploitation and there were 17 meetings held specifically.

- In terms of **ADULT SAFEGUARDING**, there were 198 adults reported to be at risk in this quarter compared to 193 in Q1. This relates to 241 reports in Q2 compared to 238 in Q1.
- Local Authority staff were the highest source of referrals/reports (57) followed by Provider Agencies (52), Police (30), Relatives/friends (25), the Health Board (24). Local Authority staff and then Provider Agencies were also the highest source of referrals in the previous quarter also.
- Emotional/psychological abuse was the highest category of abuse in this quarter, with 103 reports stating that adults at risk were experiencing this, with 90 reports stating neglect, 77 reports stating physical abuse, 51 was financial abuse and 23 was sexual abuse. In all the categories of abuse, females were predominantly reported as being the victims.
- Where safeguarding action was required, 69 enquiries reported that this was required in people's own home, 17 in the community, 15 in a care home setting and 6 in a Health care setting.
- In relation to people who were allegedly responsible for the abuse, enquiries recorded that 54 were relatives/friends, 30 paid employees, 26 "other" people and 3 other service users within a care setting.

Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions. The main points raised were as follows:

A query was raised regarding the figures on page 79, noting that 198 adults had been reported and seeking clarification on whether the higher numbers recorded by provider agencies related to visits to individuals in their own homes.

It was noted that a significant proportion of safeguarding referrals within the reporting period related to residential and domiciliary care. A large number of these referrals originated from care homes that had entered the provider concerns process, contributing to the higher figures recorded.

A concern was raised regarding individuals at home who may not be receiving any care. It was confirmed that no new care providers are currently entering the market, which is creating significant challenges as existing contracts come to an end. Officers explained that where a person at home requires care but is not currently receiving it, the case must be reviewed, the individual assessed, and an appropriate care package arranged to ensure their needs are met.

Clarification was provided that allegations and concerns of abuse or neglect relate specifically to cases that are referred and assessed, and therefore individuals who require care but are not currently receiving it would not appear in these figures. It was acknowledged that gaps can arise where care provision is unavailable, particularly as no agencies are currently operating in the area, increasing the risk that some individuals may not be seen. Officers emphasised that providing all required care in the community remains a significant challenge, with ongoing and intensive efforts in recruitment and provider engagement. Members were encouraged to contact the department directly if they become aware of anyone who may be without essential care. It was noted that only the Council can monitor provision, and all staff are

required to report suspected abuse. Questions were raised regarding whistleblowing within Adult Services, including actions taken to strengthen processes, the training provided, and confidence in current arrangements. Officers confirmed that training is delivered to all staff, including those from external agencies.

It was clarified that the paid employees referenced in the report may include staff from health, provider agencies, or others in positions of professional trust, as defined under Section 5 of the Wales Safeguarding Procedures 2019. A set procedure is followed to manage such concerns, including strategy meetings and actions such as additional training, increased supervision, or, where necessary, disciplinary processes if an individual is assessed as posing a risk to vulnerable people. It was noted that HR could provide further detail on these processes. The Corporate Manager confirmed that robust and safe recruitment practices are in place, supported by thorough induction and safeguarding training to ensure staff are suitable for their roles and understand their professional responsibilities.

Members noted that Aberystwyth has historically recorded the highest number of safeguarding referrals, but figures in the last two quarters have more than halved. A query was raised regarding the reason for this trend, with concerns expressed that such a significant reduction, without an identifiable cause, could indicate missed referrals. Officers confirmed there had been no system or process changes, and the Wales Safeguarding Procedures continue to apply. The referral process remains the same, and the team will be asked to consider whether they are aware of any underlying factors. It was also noted that similar reductions have been seen in Cardigan and Lampeter. While the decrease may reflect positive early-intervention and prevention work, members questioned whether this alone could explain the shift. Further analysis will be undertaken to determine whether the trend reflects genuine improvement or signals a potential issue.

It was AGREED to note the report

8 Draft Forward Work Programme

Each Chair/vice Chair and scrutiny officers in turn gave an update on their respective Committee's Forward Work Plans.

9 Any other matter that the Chairman decides is for the urgent attention of the Committee

10 To confirm minutes of the previous meeting and to consider any matters arising from those minutes

It was **AGREED** to confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 26th January 2026.

Confirmed at the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee held on 19 March 2026

Chairman: _____

Date: _____