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County Hall
Rhadyr
Usk
NP15 1GA

Monday, 29 January 2024

Notice of Special meeting :

People Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 6th February, 2024 at 10.00 am,
Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr USK

Please note that a pre meeting will be held 30 minutes prior to the start of the meeting for members of the committee.

AGENDA

Item No	Item	Pages
1.	Apologies for Absence	
2.	Declarations of Interest	
3.	Public Open Forum	
	Scrutiny Committee Public Open Forum ~ Guidance	
	<p>Our Scrutiny Committee meetings are live streamed and a link to the live stream will be available on the meeting page of the Monmouthshire County Council website</p> <p>If you would like to share your thoughts on any proposals being discussed by Scrutiny Committees, you can submit your representation in advance via this form</p> <p>Please share your views by uploading a video or audio file (maximum of 4 minutes) or; Please submit a written representation (via Microsoft Word, maximum of 500 words)</p> <p>You will need to register for a My Monmouthshire account in order to submit the representation or use your log in, if you have registered previously.</p>	

The deadline for submitting representations to the Council is 5pm three clear working days in advance of the meeting.

If representations received exceed 30 minutes, a selection of these based on theme will be shared at the Scrutiny Committee meeting. All representations received will be made available to councillors prior to the meeting.

If you would like to attend one of our meetings to speak under the Public Open Forum at the meeting, you will need to give three working days' notice by contacting Scrutiny@monmouthshire.gov.uk.

The amount of time afforded to each member of the public to speak is at the chair's discretion, but to enable us to accommodate multiple speakers, we ask that contributions be no longer than 3 minutes.

If you would like to suggest future topics for scrutiny by one of our Scrutiny Committees, please do so by emailing Scrutiny@monmouthshire.gov.uk

4. Development of Residential Provision: Accommodation and Delivery Model for Care

1 - 30

To scrutinise a model to increase in-county placement options and provide care without profit.

5. Scrutiny of the Strategic Equality Plan

31 - 54

Scrutiny of the Strategic Equality Plan following the consultation period.

6. Next Meeting: 5th March 2024

Paul Matthews

Chief Executive

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
CYNGOR SIR FYNWY

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE COMMITTEE IS AS FOLLOWS:

County Councillor Fay Bromfield, Llangybi Fawr;, Welsh Conservative Party
County Councillor John Crook, Magor East with Undy;, Welsh Labour/Llafur Cymru
County Councillor Christopher Edwards, St. Kingsmark;, Welsh Conservative Party
County Councillor Simon Howarth, Llanelly Hill;, Independent Group
County Councillor Penny Jones, Raglan;, Welsh Conservative Party
County Councillor Maureen Powell, Pen Y Fal;, Welsh Conservative Party
County Councillor Sue Riley, Bulwark and Thornwell;, Welsh Labour/Llafur Cymru
County Councillor Maria Stevens, Severn;, Welsh Labour/Llafur Cymru
County Councillor Jackie Strong, Caldicot Cross;, Welsh Labour/Llafur Cymru

Public Information

Access to paper copies of agendas and reports

A copy of this agenda and relevant reports can be made available to members of the public attending a meeting by requesting a copy from Democratic Services on 01633 644219. Please note that we must receive 24 hours notice prior to the meeting in order to provide you with a hard copy of this agenda.

Welsh Language

The Council welcomes contributions from members of the public through the medium of Welsh or English. We respectfully ask that you provide us with adequate notice to accommodate your needs.

Our purpose

To become a zero-carbon county, supporting well-being, health and dignity for everyone at every stage of life.

Objectives we are working towards

- Fair place to live where the effects of inequality and poverty have been reduced.
- Green place to live and work with reduced carbon emissions and making a positive contribution to addressing the climate and nature emergency.
- Thriving and ambitious place, where there are vibrant town centres and where businesses can grow and develop.
- Safe place to live where people have a home where they feel secure in.
- Connected place where people feel part of a community and are valued
- Learning place where everybody has the opportunity to reach their potential.

Our Values

Openness. We are open and honest. People have the chance to get involved in decisions that affect them, tell us what matters and do things for themselves/their communities. If we cannot do something to help, we'll say so; if it will take a while to get the answer we'll explain why; if we can't answer immediately we'll try to connect you to the people who can help – building trust and engagement is a key foundation.

Fairness. We provide fair chances, to help people and communities thrive. If something does not seem fair, we will listen and help explain why. We will always try to treat everyone fairly and consistently. We cannot always make everyone happy, but will commit to listening and explaining why we did what we did.

Flexibility. We will continue to change and be flexible to enable delivery of the most effective and efficient services. This means a genuine commitment to working with everyone to embrace new ways of working.

Teamwork. We will work with you and our partners to support and inspire everyone to get involved so we can achieve great things together. We don't see ourselves as the 'fixers' or problem-solvers, but we will make the best of the ideas, assets and resources available to make sure we do the things that most positively impact our people and places.

Monmouthshire Scrutiny Question Guide

Role of the Pre-meeting	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why is the Committee scrutinising this? (background, key issues) 2. What is the Committee's role and what outcome do Members want to achieve? 3. Is there sufficient information to achieve this? If not, who could provide this? <p>- Agree the order of questioning and which Members will lead - Agree questions for officers and questions for the Cabinet Member</p>	
Questions for the Meeting	
<p><u>Scrutinising Performance</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does performance compare with previous years? Is it better/worse? Why? 2. How does performance compare with other councils/other service providers? Is it better/worse? Why? 3. How does performance compare with set targets? Is it better/worse? Why? 4. How were performance targets set? Are they challenging enough/realistic? 5. How do service users/the public/partners view the performance of the service? 6. Have there been any recent audit and inspections? What were the findings? 7. How does the service contribute to the achievement of corporate objectives? 8. Is improvement/decline in performance linked to an increase/reduction in resource? What capacity is there to improve? 	<p><u>Scrutinising Policy</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Who does the policy affect ~ directly and indirectly? Who will benefit most/least? 2. What is the view of service users/stakeholders? What consultation has been undertaken? Did the consultation process comply with the Gunning Principles? Do stakeholders believe it will achieve the desired outcome? 3. What is the view of the community as a whole - the 'taxpayer' perspective? 4. What methods were used to consult with stakeholders? Did the process enable all those with a stake to have their say? 5. What practice and options have been considered in developing/reviewing this policy? What evidence is there to inform what works? Does the policy relate to an area where there is a lack of published research or other evidence? 6. Does the policy relate to an area where there are known inequalities? 7. Does this policy align to our corporate objectives, as defined in our corporate plan? Does it adhere to our Welsh Language Standards? 8. Have all relevant sustainable development, equalities and safeguarding implications

9. been taken into consideration? For example, what are the procedures that need to be in place to protect children?
- 10.
11. How much will this cost to implement and what funding source has been identified?
- 12.
13. How will performance of the policy be measured and the impact evaluated

General Questions:

Empowering Communities

- How are we involving local communities and empowering them to design and deliver services to suit local need?
- Do we have regular discussions with communities about service priorities and what level of service the council can afford to provide in the future?
- Is the service working with citizens to explain the role of different partners in delivering the service, and managing expectations?
- Is there a framework and proportionate process in place for collective performance assessment, including from a citizen's perspective, and do you have accountability arrangements to support this?
- Has an Equality Impact Assessment been carried out? If so, can the Leader and Cabinet/Senior Officers provide members with copies and a detailed explanation of the EQIA conducted in respect of these proposals?
- Can the Leader and Cabinet/Senior Officers assure members that these proposals comply with Equality and Human Rights legislation? Do the proposals comply with the Local Authority's Strategic Equality Plan?

Service Demands

- How will policy and legislative change affect how the council operates?
- Have we considered the demographics of our council and how this will impact on service delivery and funding in the future?
- Have you identified and considered the long-term trends that might affect your service area, what impact these trends could have on your service/your service could have on these trends, and what is being done in response?

Financial Planning

- Do we have robust medium and long-term financial plans in place?
- Are we linking budgets to plans and outcomes and reporting effectively on these?

Making savings and generating income

- Do we have the right structures in place to ensure that our efficiency, improvement and transformational approaches are working together to maximise savings?
- How are we maximising income?
- Have we compared other council's policies to maximise income and fully considered the implications on service users?
- Do we have a workforce plan that takes into account capacity, costs, and skills of the

actual versus desired workforce?

Questions to ask within a year of the decision:

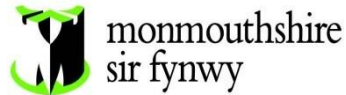
- Were the intended outcomes of the proposal achieved or were there other results?
- Were the impacts confined to the group you initially thought would be affected i.e. older people, or were others affected e.g. people with disabilities, parents with young children?
- Is the decision still the right decision or do adjustments need to be made?

Questions for the Committee to conclude...

Do we have the necessary information to form conclusions/make recommendations to the executive, council, other partners? If not, do we need to:

- (i) Investigate the issue in more detail?
- (ii) Obtain further information from other witnesses – Executive Member, independent expert, members of the local community, service users, regulatory bodies...

Agree further actions to be undertaken within a timescale/future monitoring report...



SUBJECT: Developing children’s residential and 16+ supported accommodation placements

MEETING: People Scrutiny

DATE: 6th February 2024

DIVISIONS/WARD AFFECTED: All

1. Purpose

1.1 This report is brought to the People Scrutiny Committee for it to conduct pre-decision scrutiny on the proposals outlined within.

1.2 This report sets out our proposed approach for the development of children’s residential and 16+ supported accommodation placements based on an analysis of current and predicted need.

1.3 The report considers two distinct elements of developing placements, these being i) the building-based / accommodation element of the provision; and ii) the provision of direct care and support.

1.4 The report locates the development of residential and supported accommodation placements within the context of national and local policy objectives.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The People Scrutiny Committee is asked to scrutinise the proposals outlined in this report and make any recommendations.

2.2 The following recommendations will be made to the Council when it meets to consider the report on 29th February:

2.3 The Council endorses the approach to developing ‘in-house’ residential placements and 16+ supported accommodation placements for children who are looked after and young people who are care experienced or homeless.

2.4 The Council endorses the proposal that, in the first instance, Children’s Services will look to re-purpose existing assets available to the Council in order to provide children’s residential and 16+ supported accommodation placements, subject to appropriate business cases and cabinet approval.

2.5 Where re-purposing is not viable the Council endorses the direct acquisition from the open market of suitable properties or land for the purpose of developing children’s residential provision or 16+ supported accommodation, subject to appropriate business cases and cabinet approval.

2.6 The Council agrees that borrowing headroom is increased to up to £3 Million to support the direct acquisition from the open market of suitable properties or land; and / or to support refurbishment or repurposing costs, subject to appropriate business cases and cabinet approval.

2.7 The Council agrees that the any decisions to draw on the borrowing headroom for the purposes set out within this report will be made by Cabinet.

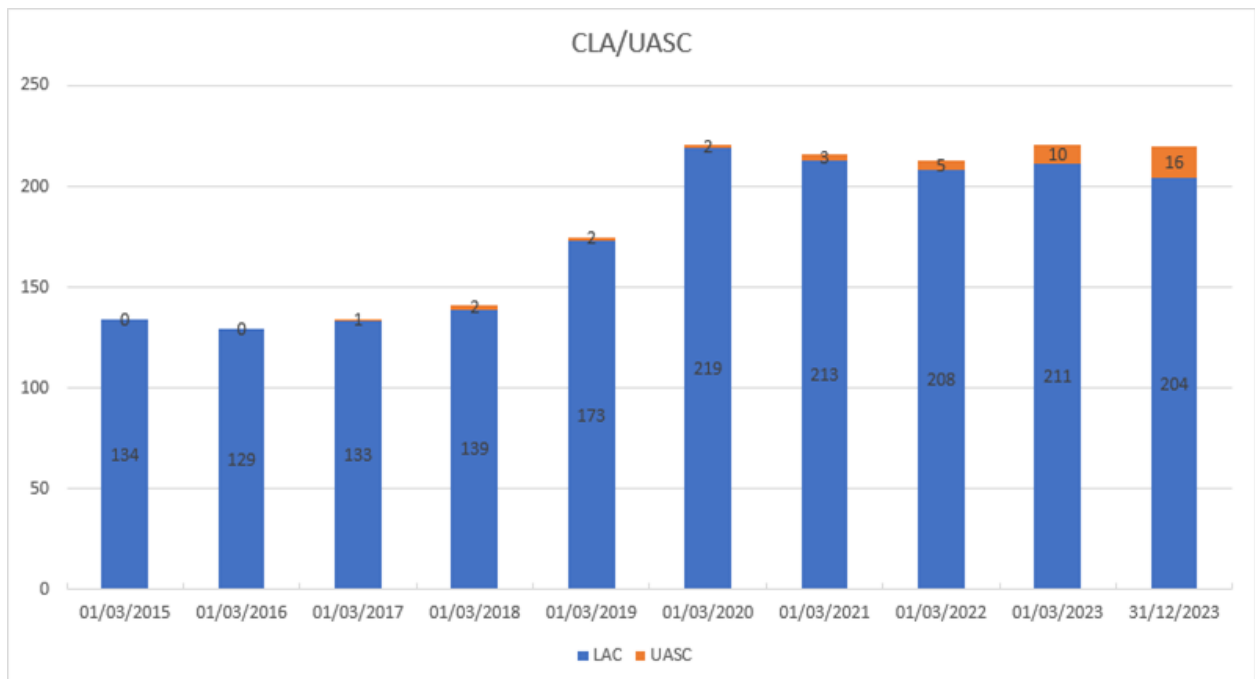
2.8 The reports and business cases that support any property acquisitions made, such that fall within the circumstances outlined in this report, are reported into the next available meeting of the Place Scrutiny Committee for post-decision scrutiny.

3. Key Issues

Demand

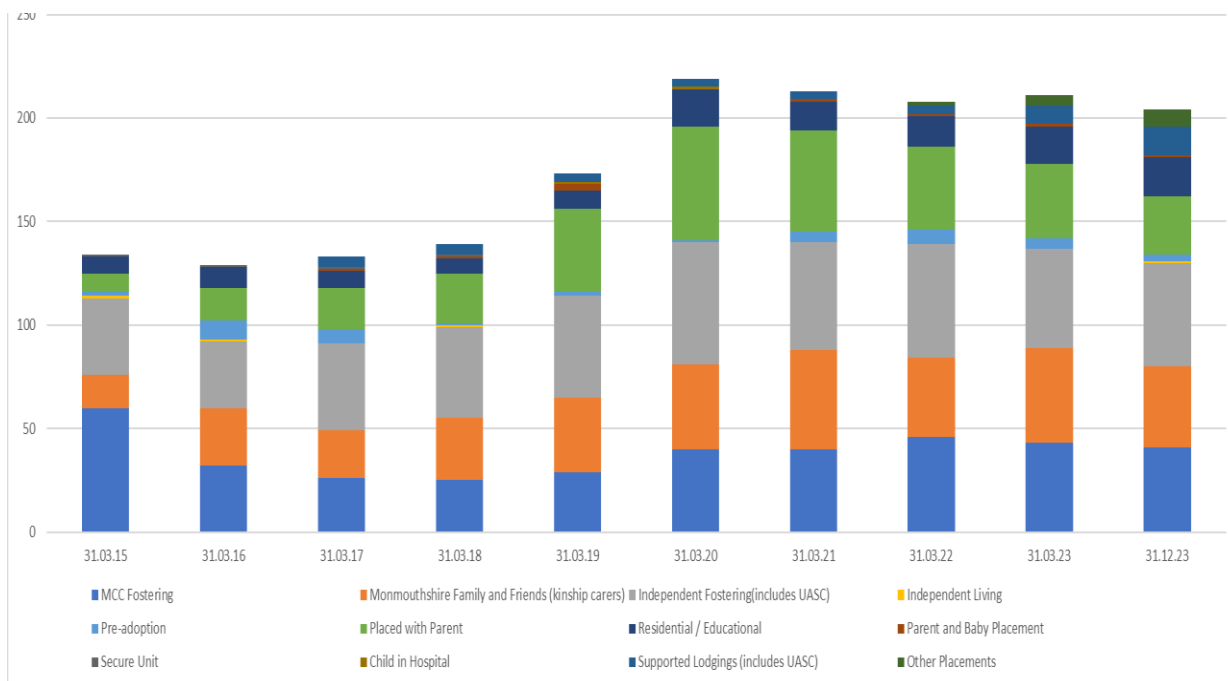
3.1 A primary objective within Children’s Services is to prevent the need for children to come into care and to remain living safely within their families and communities. In situations where prevention is not possible our aim is to provide safe and appropriate care with kinship carers, foster carers or in residential settings. We work with children who are in care, and their families, so that as soon as it is safe and practicable to do so children are enabled to leave care in a planned way. Our operational drive over recent years has been to ensure that the right services are in place at every tier of need to support these objectives. As a result, the numbers of children in care have started to stabilise, albeit that the number of children looked after has increased significantly over the last 8 years.

Fig.1 Child Looked After population between year-end 2015 to year end of December 2023, denoting the number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)



3.2 The increased capability within the service to support children remaining with their families means that those children who are in care are more likely to have complex needs such that require specialised placements including residential care. This graph shows an on-going use of residential placements and a continued reliance on independent fostering agencies. Both placement types are very costly and are not always in the best interests of children.

Fig.2 Distribution of placement types over the last 8 years



Placement Sufficiency

3.3 When children come into care an assessment is made of their holistic needs so that we can find the most suitable placement for them. Ideally, there should be a range of options available to help us find a good match for each child or sibling group, preferably within a family placement or with a foster carer, and where this cannot be achieved within a residential setting. In recent times, choice over placements has been extremely limited because the availability and suitability of looked after child placements in general have not kept pace with the requirements of the service.

3.4 There are insufficient suitable foster placements for Monmouthshire children and a continued over-reliance on the use of carers that offer placements via Independent Fostering Agencies, many of which are located outside of the County and therefore not always ideal from a child's perspective. The service remains committed to increasing the number of placements we can make with Monmouthshire carers. There is a comprehensive fostering strategy in place that seeks to support the recruitment and retention of in-house foster carers.

3.5 There is a national shortage of residential placements, which is exacerbated by the insufficiency of foster placements, and more recently by the instability of the provider market following the Welsh Government policy initiative to drive profit out of children's care.

3.6 These shortages place considerable pressure on resources and sometimes mean that we are unable to place a child in the right setting that best meets their needs, and in some situations has forced us to look after a child in an unregistered placement.

3.7 Similarly, we do not have sufficient supported accommodation placements for older children and what we do have quickly becomes saturated because of difficulties in securing move-on accommodation. A lack of throughput can mean that young people remain in foster care or residential settings for longer than is in-keeping with their need for increased independence; and simultaneously blocks placements for other children.

3.8 Within this context, our current commissioning data and analysis indicates that Children's Services must significantly increase the number of all placement types that are available to ensure that children's needs are consistently met; and to provide increased stability and certainty in our care planning for children.

The Number of Placements Required

3.9 The predicted number of additional residential and supported accommodation placements that we need, based on current demand, are as follows:

Residential Children's Home (Standard)		
Current Demand	Existing Provision	Further placements required
19	0 All placements are currently spot purchased externally	12
Residential Children's Home (Bespoke)		
Current Demand	Existing Provision	Further placements required
6	4 Woodview and Skirrid View	2
Supported Accommodation		
Current Demand	Existing Provision	Further placements required
Approx 37	15 Pobl X 2 provisions for UASC	20

Residential Children's Home (Standard)

3.10 Residential Children's Homes (standard) should provide a homely setting, usually with a maximum of 4 / 5 children with good access to local amenities and facilities. A positive match between the children is critical, as is the provision of a skilled and stable workforce. Residential Children's Homes are registered with CIW (Care Inspectorate Wales) and come under a regulatory framework through RISCA (Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016).

- As at the end of Dec 2023, there were 17 children in spot-purchased, for-profit residential placements plus an additional 2 children who were not in regulated provision making the total demand 19.
- The Local Authority does not have any in-house provision for these types of placements.
- We are currently seeking to develop 12 in-house placements via 3 properties either through re-purposing an existing asset or through acquisition from the open market.
- This would guard against the risk of over-provision and allow some flexibility to continue to procure placements from 3rd sector (not-for-profit). We would review demand and the need for any additional placement development on an annual basis as the local, regional and national picture continues to evolve.

Residential Children's Home (Bespoke)

3.11 Residential Children's Homes (bespoke) allow for a residential placement to be designed around the specific needs of an individual child/ren. Bespoke placements are needed where children present with complex disability or psychological difficulties often

arising from adverse childhood experiences, trauma or abuse. Placements are supported by a multi-agency team and to provide a therapeutic care plan in accordance with a child's needs. Such placements are often located in non-residential areas with access to some secure outside space. Bespoke placements are also registered with CIW. Finding placements for children who require this sort of specialised residential provision is the most challenging and can be extremely costly, and often results in children being placed away from their homes and communities.

- As at the end of Dec 2023, 5 children needed a bespoke placement.
- The Local Authority has 2 provisions (Woodview and Skirrid View) with the capacity for 2 placements in each (although both provisions are required for solo-use placements currently).
- Woodview is a Local Authority owned property and there is a contract in place with Action For Children to provide the care.
- Skirrid View is owned by Monmouth Housing Association who lease the property to the Council and there is a contract in place with a for-profit organisation to provide the care.
- We are currently seeking to develop 2 further in-house placements via 1 additional property, either through re-purposing an existing asset or through direct acquisition.

Supported Accommodation

3.12 16+ Supported Accommodation is intended to help and support young people over the age of 16 and up to 24 years to develop their independent living skills as they navigate the transition into young adulthood. Supported accommodation provides a stepping stone to young people leaving care, who may not be fully ready to take on their own tenancies. At the same time supported accommodation can be accessed by 16+ young people who are homeless; or who are unaccompanied asylum seekers. The provision does not come under RISCA and there is no requirement for the provision to be registered with CIW.

- Currently there are 37 young people aged 16-17 who will leave care within the next 2 years and 13 more who are turning 16 in the next 12 months, making the total projected demand approximately 50.
- The Local Authority has the capacity for up to 15 supported accommodation placements currently.
- This comprises 2 partnership schemes (with a for-profit organisation) specifically for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and a jointly developed project and Service Level Agreement with Pobl for Supported Accommodation Placements for care leavers.
- We are currently seeking to develop approximately 20 additional placements via re-purposing and existing asset or through direct acquisition.
- This would guard against the risk of over-provision, particularly as not all care experienced children need support accommodation placements. We would review the situation annually to check demand against proposed developments.

Developing Placements - Accommodation

3.13 To provide residential placements for children and young people two elements must be considered:- i) the accommodation / building element and ii) the workforce element i.e. the care and support that is provided to children.

3.14 With regards to the accommodation element of developing residential children's homes, there are stringent regulatory requirements under RISCA which must be met including such matters as room size, suitability of communal and outdoor space, fire, health and safety issues together with environmental and location considerations.

3.15 In the first instance our approach to securing properties is to consider the suitability of re-purposing existing assets within the Council or through our RSL (Regional Social Landlords) partners.

3.16 Alongside of this, and because it is unlikely that the Council's existing asset base will fully meet our requirements, we are continuing to search for suitable properties via the open market.

3.17 All properties that we have considered so far require works to be undertaken to ensure compliance with RISCA and render them suitable for their intended purpose. Children's Services are working in partnership with Property Services to draw-up the relevant specifications so that refurbishment costs are properly represented within business-cases for each project.

3.18 Our approach, in either re-purposing existing assets or acquiring properties from the open market, has the potential to take full advantage of any available Welsh Government grants and ensures that assets remain with the Council. To this end, the Council continues to work in partnership with Welsh Government, the Aneurin Bevan Health Board, Registered Social Landlords and other Local Authorities, such as to secure funding and/or suitable alternative provision that would look to mitigate or avoid the need for the borrowing headroom to be drawn upon.

Developing Placements – Providing Care and Support

3.19 In respect of the provision of care and support for **residential children's homes** in the context of the eliminate agenda, there are essentially 2 service delivery models: - either through an in-house Local Authority residential service; or via a procurement route where the Local Authority tenders for a not-for-profit organisation to provide the care.

3.20 From a Monmouthshire Children's Services perspective, our current preferred approach is for a combination of both these delivery models. This would see us develop an in-house residential provision whilst leaving the procurement route open, with the right approach being determined on a project-by-project basis via a cabinet decision. This recognises that there are benefits and risks associated with each delivery model, and that as each project develops there will be a number of variables to be taken into consideration. Given the uncertainty and instability of the external context, the service will need to be flexible and adaptive in order to respond to circumstances as they evolve during this development phase. The benefits and risks for the service associated with each delivery model are set out at Annexe 1 and are discussed in summary below.

3.21 A **procurement route** allows the service to seek to enter into a partnership relationship with a not-for-profit provider, who would then take over the management and operational delivery of the provision on a contractual basis, including meeting all the associated regulatory requirements.

3.22 There is concern within the sector that the not-for-profit provider market is not yet sufficiently developed to move into the gap that is currently filled by profit making companies. Equally, there is little indication at this point, of any appetite within profit making organisations for a change of business model. Within this context we are concerned that our ability to secure a partnership arrangement with a not-for-profit organisation to provide residential care might be extremely limited.

3.23 The service is equally aware, however, that maintaining partnership relationships with not-for-profit providers can create opportunities and brings with it the advantages of having a mixed economy approach to providing residential care for Monmouthshire children.

3.24 An **in-house model** would require the Service to develop a residential care workforce and management structure. Establishing an in-house service would be a significant step for the service and would present various strategic and operational risks and challenges including workforce, financial / commissioning risks as well as managing performance and quality assurance issues against a statutory regulatory framework. However, we feel that the knowledge and experience gained within the service over the last two years having already supported the development of two projects, the service is well-placed to manage these challenges.

3.25 To take forward the development of an in-house residential service the intention is to recruit a suitably skilled and experienced person at Service Manager level. The revenue costs for this post would be financed through a Welsh Government grant for the first year and would subsequently be brought into the Children's Services budget structure. Children's Services recognises that there are risks associated with this option, particularly as we have not yet *tested the market* for suitable candidates.

3.26 Having carefully considered the associated benefits, dis-benefits and risks (see Annexe 1) the service has concluded that an in-house residential service should be established at this point to ensure the future sustainability of the service and to ensure that moving forward, we have the right provision in place to meet the needs of children and young people. The over-riding factor in reaching this conclusion is that an in-house service would support an integrated practice model with the rest of children's services including a shared ethos and practice base resulting in better outcomes for children. Importantly, it would support broader care planning for children looked after as placements and matching would remain wholly within our control. Additionally, once the infra-structure of a residential provision is established it should be easier to scale up as required with increased flexibility depending on the needs of the service. An in-house service model would align with the ambition to take profit out of children's care and protect the service from escalating charges within external providers.

3.27 The option of seeking partners to provide both the care and accommodation element of a residential children's home has been discounted at this point, as recent market intelligence suggests that the ability to attract tenders would be extremely limited. Furthermore, the option would have less potential to generate cost savings for the authority.

3.28 By way of contrast, in respect of the provision of **16+ supported accommodation**, the service is not intending to develop in-house support with the preferred model being to work in partnership with a not-for-profit provider, such as an RSL. Expertise in providing housing-based support exists within the not-for-profit / RSL arena and there are already established models in place for Monmouthshire children / young people. On this basis, we are confident that we will have a positive response to a tendering exercise such that will meet our requirements for the support element of 16+ support accommodation schemes.

Legal & Policy Context

3.29 Under Section 75 of the Social Services and Wellbeing Wales Act the Local Authority has a duty to ensure that there are sufficient and appropriate placements for children who are Looked After. The Act also requires the Local Authority to provide suitable accommodation and support to care experienced young people and the same duty applies to 16 / 17-year-olds who present as homeless.

3.30 The Chief Officer for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health is able to act under powers within the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014 to ensure that suitable accommodation is secured to meet care needs.

National Level

3.32 In its Programme for Government, Welsh Ministers have made a commitment to eliminate private profit from the care of looked after children by the end of the Senedd term. This is a top priority commitment for the Government and one which requires a range of partners and expertise to deliver. This business case supports this policy initiative.

Local Level

3.33 Providing high quality placements that support children to remain closer to their homes and communities features in the community and corporate plan. The ambition to reduce the costs associated with the provision of placements for children who are looked after, with an emphasis on proactive care planning, accords with the savings proposals put forward within this Council's 2024 – 2025 provisional budget.

3.34 The proposal accords with the Council's Asset Management Strategy which was approved by Full Council on 17th January 2024. The strategy commits the Council to having fit-for-purpose assets and to make maximum use of vacant space.

4. Equality and Future Gens Assessment

4.1 Children who are looked after and care experienced children are more likely to have experienced disadvantage and adversity including poverty; poor housing; poor parental health and disability. It is well known that the life chances and outcomes for care experienced children are poorer than their counterparts and that in adulthood they are at increased risk of experiencing ill-health, homelessness and having lower employment and educational opportunities. Adverse experiences within their birth families can be aggravated by poor experiences within care, particularly for those young people with more complex needs and disabilities.

4.2 In line with the Council's corporate parenting and safeguarding responsibilities, this proposal seeks to overcome some of these challenges by expanding the Council's capacity to place children closer to their homes and communities. This helps to maintain vital relationships and support networks which otherwise may become fragmented. The provision of an in-house or partnership model will allow for increased integration and multi-disciplinary which helps to support good outcomes for children.

5. Options Appraisal

Option 1 Do nothing

5.1 The council could choose not to seek to develop any further residential or supported accommodation placements. This would potentially release leadership capacity within Children's Services and other directorates; and at least in an immediate sense would protect the council from the financial risk of borrowing.

5.2 The Local Authority would remain heavily reliant on external provision, with little control or influence over being able to place children appropriately in the way that best meets their needs. Reliance on an insufficient provider market can mean that children are placed away from their homes and communities. The fragility of the market could either mean that we

have no available placements and that such placements as are available are disproportionately expensive.

5.3 Current information is that the for-profit provision will continue to be under-developed in the near term and therefore will not be able to respond to the insufficiency challenges currently playing out; and that similarly provisions being stood up by other LAs again at least in the near term are being predominantly designed to solve their own issues. Any release of leadership capacity would be overtaken by the operational risks and challenges associated with placement searching and, as a last resort, the use of un-registered (illegal) placements. The impact of being in situations where the service has had no choice but to set up an unregulated placement is incredibly stressful and demoralising for the workforce and causes significant service disruption.

5.4 For these reasons, the option of 'doing nothing' is too risky; is not a viable or sustainable option at this point and has therefore been discounted.

Option 2

Develop residential and supported accommodation placements specifically for Monmouthshire children as set out within this report

5.5 Developing our own residential and supported accommodation placements would go some way to ensure that moving forward, we are able to place children appropriately. The aspiration is to have an in-house residential provision which more closely replicates family life and meets the placement requirements of children and young people with complex needs which cannot be met through foster care or other family placements. Equally, our ambition, to expand supported accommodation placements for care experienced young people through a partnership model, will support good outcomes for children as they prepare for living independently as young adults.

This option would deliver a range of benefits:

For children

5.6 The benefits for children are that they are more likely to be able to remain within or close to their community. This means that they are more likely to be able to attend the same school, continue with hobbies, talents and interests, have more meaningful and engaging time with their birth families, relatives and friends, which ultimately could result in a quicker return home or a placement with a friend or family member.

5.7 Children also benefit from continuity of care and relationships within their professional network and support can be more accessible and flexible. Similarly, an in-house provision can support close integrated working across a multi-disciplinary network enabling better outcomes for children.

5.8 Children who are placed some distance away from their families and networks, are at far greater risk of becoming isolated and can begin to dissociate themselves from their local community. This can result in significant difficulties when their care ends – with young people finding it difficult to establish a sense of belonging and experiencing challenges in re-building fragmented relationships.

Operational and financial benefits include:

5.9 Option 2 will reduce reliance on profit-based solutions to providing residential placements. It will allow the service to have greater control over matching and placement

decisions and to determine the wider aspects of care planning across the cohort of children who are looked after.

5.10 Reducing the number of children who are placed away from the area will save childcare practitioner time and cost in travelling to establishments and increase job satisfaction. Expanding the available provision into 16+ supported accommodation will increase the service ability to step-down children from residential provision to support their transition as care leavers.

5.11 There will be a greater level of control over the financial outlay relating to residential provision.

Option 2 is the recommended option.

6. Evaluation Criteria

The overall evaluation method associated with the proposals are as follows:

Criteria	Baseline
Total number of children who are looked after	204
Number of children in for-profit residential placements	18
Number of children in non-LA not-for-profit residential placements	1
Number of council / RSL owned properties that are being utilised to provide residential / supported accommodation	2
Number of children in residential placements provided via the LA	0
Number of not-for-profit supported accommodation placements	3
Number of for-profit supported accommodation placements	12

Evaluation criteria will be established for individual projects set against the intended specifications and in accordance with an identified timeline.

7. Reasons

7.1 In summary this report looks to respond to the current external context and challenges associated with the provision of children’s social care in a proportionate and flexible way, and in a way which is both sustainable and does not leave the Council wholly dependent on an uncertain provider market. This meets the wellbeing and safeguarding needs of children and young people and provides an affordable means by which the Council can deliver against care needs and when set against the cost that the Council would have had to face in securing provision through the provider market.

7.2 The proposals will support the Council to fulfil its statutory duty to provide sufficient and suitable placements for children who are looked after and is in keeping with national and local policy direction.

7.3 The recommendation for Cabinet to approve any draw-down on borrowing headroom will provide balance and transparency within decision making, whilst still allowing operational objectives to be achieved in circumstances where speed of decision making may be critical.

8. Resource Implications

8.1 On 27th January 2022, the Council agreed that borrowing headroom of up to £2 Million could be used to support the development of children's residential provision. This supported the purchase and subsequent development of Woodview children's home. A successful grant application allowed this borrowing to be reduced so that there is now £1.86 Million remaining within the original borrowing headroom. This report proposes that this is now extended up to £3 Million to support the further acquisition and repurposing of assets to support the development of the Council's residential provision. The borrowing will only be required at a time when business cases are submitted and initially approved by the S151 officer of the Council prior to a cabinet decision, in line with the report's recommendations. The borrowing costs will be met from existing Children's Services budgets.

8.2 The borrowing headroom being created will only support property acquisition costs and any resultant costs to modify the property to make it fit for purpose; or the costs associated with modifying an existing council asset. All associated revenue costs, including on-going building maintenance and repair, will be met from existing Children's Services budgets.

8.3 Any use of the borrowing will result in the acquisition and/or development of property. The Council's Landlord Services teams will look to provide ongoing support and to ensure that any assets acquired are well maintained and to ensure that asset values are retained such that best value is derived upon any subsequent disposal. However, it is worth noting that any accommodation being vacated might not automatically lead to disposal as it might be retained at that point for future use.

8.4 The Council will work in partnership with Welsh Government, the Aneurin Bevan Health Board, Registered Social Landlords and other Local Authorities, such as to secure funding. The Council will seek to acquire properties for residential children's homes and 16 plus supported accommodation schemes (either through direct purchase or through partnership with RSL) on the basis that this maximises available grants and so that the Local Authority or RSL retains the asset. If successful, such bids will allow us to greatly reduce the borrowing cost to the council.

8.5 The business case required to justify any acquisition will need to outline an independent valuation being undertaken by a qualified valuer. Revenue business cases will then detail the overall costs (and unit cost) of each provision which would include workforce and leadership costs, building, amenities, food and recreation costs, insurance, and any provision for voids.

8.6 At month 6 we were forecasting to spend annually the sum of £5,337,030 to purchase 19 beds, which equates to an annual cost per bed of £280,896. The 3 options below look at facilities for 12 beds, so the current cost as a comparator for basing savings would be an annual equivalent cost of £3,370,752. This shows that there are potential opportunities for savings to be made by moving away from spot-purchasing residential placements. Comparatively, the cost of providing an in-house residential service is more than commissioning a not-for-profit organisation. However, to rely solely on this approach would be too risky both financially and operationally because it is unlikely that there will be sufficient interest or capacity within the not-for-profit provider market to meet our requirements. Although comparatively an in-house service costs more, there are advantages around ensuring good outcomes for children and allowing the Council to reduce its dependency on the external market, that make it worthwhile.

Model	Average Annual Cost Per Bed (£)	Projected Annual Cost (£) (based on 12 units)	Projected Annual Savings (£) (based on 12 units)
Current Model External residential children's home placements as at month 6 2023/24	280,896	3,370,752	
LA owned accommodation with care and support provided through an in-house residential service	201,795	2,421,540	949,212
RSL owned accommodation with care and support provided through an in-house residential service	210,770	2,529,240	841,512
LA owned accommodation with care and support provided through a 'not-for-profit' organisation	163,450	1,961,400	1,409,352

8.7 The savings proposal of £1.3 Million put forward by Children's Services within the Council's budget setting process for 2024 / 2025 assumes that some of these savings will be achieved through placement changes that are proposed as set out within this report.

8.8 The Service is intending to create a post and recruit a permanent service manager with responsibility for developing an in-house residential provision. This would cost £85K inclusive of on-costs and assuming a 4.25% pay increase in line with the MTFP. For the first year this post would be financed through a Welsh Government grant (and therefore cost neutral to the Local Authority) with subsequent yearly costs being built into the Children's Services budget. The expectation would be that as in-house provisions are developed; salary costs would be recoverable against any savings made.

9. Consultees

Social Care and Health DMT
Senior Leadership Team, Monmouthshire County Council
Nicholas Keyse, Head of Landlord Services, Monmouthshire County Council

10. Background Papers

None

11. Author

Jane Rodgers, Chief Officer for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health

Janerodgers@monmouthshire.gov.uk

Annexe 1

Considerations regarding the benefits, dis-benefits and risks of i) establishing an in-house residential service and ii) procuring care via a not-for-profit organisation

Establish an in-house residential service - Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overall management of service quality, design and the operation of the homes, together with an integrated practice model• Residential care staff would be recruited and trained to work alongside other Children's Services' staff, with a shared ethos and practice base• Potential for some flexibility of workforce across services and provisions (e.g. residential care staff would retain links and offer support to children moving on from residential services.)• Greater control over which children access the provision with more ability to positively risk manage and match children• Better opportunity to align the child's social worker and the in-house residential provision to facilitate and promote family and community connections.• Potential improved MDT working and connection with internal resources such as education and specialist family support• Once established potential for scaling up (into new provision) quicker than through a procurement route• An in-house provided residential care service will be supported by the Regional Eliminate Team, in setting up and running of a residential care home.• Mitigation of voids through partnership with other Gwent Local Authorities, or other Welsh Local Authorities on a reciprocal arrangement.•
Establish an in-house residential service - Dis-benefits and Risks
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The service has a lack of experience in developing and managing in-house children's residential care homes.• There is limited capacity and no established infrastructure (at present) to support a residential service (e.g. responsible individual / service manager, care home manager, project manager, managing recruitment, finance, human resources).• The service would need to work closely with Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) to achieve Good or Outstanding rating• Children's Services would be solely responsible for the effective management and delivery of the service, with reputational risk should there be poor delivery / adverse CIW inspections• Recruitment will be challenging• An in-house provision may prove to be more expensive, due to what the Council pays its staff (staffing costs account for approximately 80% of cost of providing the service); however, increased control and management of voids may off-set that• There will be resource implications in setting up and managing an in-house provided residential care home (both financial resources and human resources).
<p>MITIGATIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Over the last two years the service has gained some experience of supporting residential developments through establishing Woodview• The service intends to establish a service manager post to build the infra-structure required as projects are developed

- For the next year the service is benefiting from additional capacity and expertise through a regional resource to support Local Authorities with the challenges associated with eliminate agenda.
- There is experience of providing regulated services under RISCA within adults' services.

Tender for care - Benefits

- Being a good partner and supporting the not-for-profit provider arena (the timing of a change in approach is good; the voluntary/third sector is keen to explore different ways of working with local authorities).
- External Providers have experience in developing and managing children's residential care homes
- The administrative and managerial responsibility for recruiting, training and supervising a residential workforce will not rest solely with the LA.
- The Council holds less risk in terms of redeploying staff or paying redundancy should it decide it no longer requires the externally provided residential care home at a later date.
- The responsibility of registering and maintaining the provision in line with CIW regulations will remain with the provider.
- As a commissioner, the service will be able to hold the provider to account for service quality
- External providers can mobilise and set up a service quicker than the Council, and may be able to pull in additional benefits and resources
- Block contracts may help reduce cost
- The Council will have the contractual ability to negotiate voids, packages of care with an externally provided residential care home partnership.

Tender for care - Dis-benefits and risks

- Externally provided residential care home partnership providers can still reject referrals, set out their own matching criteria and give notice to discharge children and young people which could result in finding new, possibly more expensive placements.
- The Council has less control over an external provision in terms of matching and risk plans around individual children - although this could be mitigated to some extent within the contract. There will be less flexibility.
- At the same time the LA would be responsible for voids
- There is reputational risk to the Council if service standards decline within the externally provided residential care home (ultimately it will fall back on us, but the risk is more shared)
- The provision would be managed via the organisation's management structure, with its own separate governance arrangements, staff development and training, which could in turn lead to different values/cultures.
- There is an under development of not-for-profit providers and there is a sense that not-for-profit organisations are starting to over-extend – there is a real risk that a partnership orientated provider would not come forward or find this partnership arrangement an attractive offer.
- Some for-profit providers are seeking to change to meet the new legal requirements but are likely to want to remain on a spot-purchase basis.

- Each project would likely require a separate procurement process which could lead to arrangements with different providers, therefore loss any economies of scale and resource intensive

MITIGATIONS

- The service has experience of procuring organisations to provide care and of working in partnership with 3rd sector organisations
- The procurement process would establish whether organisations were viable to contract with
- The Local Authority can chose whether to contract for care (particularly given the aspiration to develop an in-house provision)
- If contracts are in place there would be on-going contract monitoring for quality assurance independent of CIW.



Integrated Impact Assessment document

(incorporating Equalities, Future Generations, Welsh Language and Socio Economic Duty)

<p>Name of the Officer completing the evaluation</p> <p>Jane Rodgers Phone no: E-mail: janerodgers@monmouthshire.gov.uk</p>	<p>Please give a brief description of the aims of the proposal</p> <p>To develop 'in-house' residential placements and 16+ supported accommodation placements for care experienced children</p>
<p>Name of Service area</p> <p>Children's Services</p>	<p>Date</p> <p>January 2024</p>

4 Are your proposals going to affect any people or groups of people with protected characteristics? Please explain the impact, the evidence you have used and any action you are taking below.

Protected Characteristics	Describe any positive impacts your proposal has on the protected characteristic	Describe any negative impacts your proposal has on the protected characteristic	What has been/will be done to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
Age	The proposal seeks to support children and young people who are looked after or care experienced to live closer to their homes and communities and to be appropriately supported to develop their independence. Children of any age between 0 - 17 years can need to be cared for by the Local Authority. Currently the impact of the operating context, where there is a significant shortage of placements is having an adverse impact on children: Children may be impacted by the lack of placement choice and availability Children may feel that there is an expectation that they leave placements before they are ready.	None identified at this point	<p>Individual care planning for children is in place which takes into account children's individual needs and personal outcomes in line with the stage of development.</p> <p>Schemes such as supported lodgings and When I Am Ready are encouraged</p> <p>Support services are in place to help children develop skills and personal resilience.</p> <p>This proposal concerns the expansion of placement choice and availability.</p>
Disability	Children with more complex needs and disabilities are disproportionately impacted by the lack of suitable placements – this proposal is seeking to address this through the development of bespoke services and provision.	None identified at this point	<p>Individual care planning for children is in place which takes into account children's individual needs and personal outcomes in line with the stage of development.</p> <p>Schemes such as supported lodgings and When I Am Ready are encouraged</p> <p>Support services are in place to help children develop skills and personal resilience.</p> <p>This proposal concerns the expansion of placement choice and availability.</p>

Protected Characteristics	Describe any positive impacts your proposal has on the protected characteristic	Describe any negative impacts your proposal has on the protected characteristic	What has been/will be done to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
Gender reassignment	None identified at this point	None identified at this point	None identified at this point
Marriage or civil partnership	None identified at this point	None identified at this point	None identified at this point
Pregnancy or maternity	None identified at this point	None identified at this point	None identified at this point
Race	<p>When matching placements for children who are looked after this should take account of race, religious, cultural and identity needs – the proposal seeks to continue to ensure that suitable placements are available for children in line with their race, culture and identity needs including Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children. <i>Think about what the proposal will do to promote race equality with the aim of: eliminating unlawful discrimination, promoting equality of opportunity and promoting good relations between persons of different racial groups. Also think about the potential to affect racial groups differently. Issues to look at include providing translation/interpreting services, cultural issues and customs, access to services, issues relating to Asylum Seeker, Refugee, Gypsy & Traveller, migrant communities and recording of racist incidents etc</i></p>	None identified at this point	Increase training and awareness across the service to ensure that services, practitioners and carers are skilled and trained to support all children in their race, religious, cultural and identify needs.

Protected Characteristics	Describe any positive impacts your proposal has on the protected characteristic	Describe any negative impacts your proposal has on the protected characteristic	What has been/will be done to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
Religion or Belief	.When matching placements for children who are looked after this should take account of race, religious, cultural and identity needs – the proposal seeks to continue to ensure that suitable placements are available for children in line with their race, culture and identity needs. <i>What the likely impact is e.g. dietary issues, religious holidays or days</i>	None identified at this point	Increase training and awareness across the service to ensure that services, practitioners and carers are skilled and trained to support all children in their race, religious, cultural and identify needs.
Sex	None identified at this point	None identified at this point	
Sexual Orientation	When matching placements for children who are looked after this should take account of their sexual orientation and identity needs – the proposal seeks to continue to ensure that suitable placements are available for children in line with their identity needs. <i>.Consider the provision of inclusive services for e.g. older and younger people from the Lesbian, Gay and Bi-sexual communities. Also consider what issues there are for employment and training</i>	None identified at this point	Increase training and awareness across the service to ensure that services, practitioners and carers are skilled and trained to support all children in their race, religious, cultural and identify needs.

2. The Socio-economic Duty and Social Justice

The Socio-economic Duty requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to reduce inequalities of outcome which result from socio-economic disadvantage when taking key decisions This duty aligns with our commitment as an authority to Social Justice.

	Describe any positive impacts your proposal has in respect of people suffering socio economic disadvantage	Describe any negative impacts your proposal has in respect of people suffering socio economic disadvantage.	What has been/will be done to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
<p>Socio-economic Duty and Social Justice</p>	<p>Children who are looked after and care experienced young people often face social economic disadvantage and a paucity of support networks – the proposal seeks to provide the best support for young people as they approach adulthood through the provision of appropriate accommodation, support and services.</p> <p>The proposal seeks to arrest the amount of money that is being spent on profit-making organisations and encourage the development of not-for-profit provision, including in-house services, so that further investment can be kept in Wales and retained for the benefit of children.</p> <p><i>Under the Welsh Language measure of 2011, we need to be considering Welsh Language in signage, documentation, posters, language skills etc. and also the requirement to promote the language</i></p>	<p>None identified at this point</p> <p><i>Describe any negative impacts that your proposal/s will have on people or groups of people who suffer socio-economic disadvantage.</i></p>	<p>Ensure that practitioners and carers understand the impact of socio-economic disadvantage on individuals who are care experienced and how these may be overcome.</p> <p>Work with the corporate parenting panel to consider ways in which the whole council can support children who are looked after and care experienced.</p> <p><i>What has been/will be done to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts in relation to the Socio-economic disadvantage.</i></p>

3. Policy making and the Welsh language.

How does your proposal impact on the following aspects of the Council's Welsh Language Standards:	Describe the positive impacts of this proposal	Describe the negative impacts of this proposal	What has been/will be done to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts
<p>Policy Making</p> <p>Effects on the use of the Welsh language,</p> <p>Promoting Welsh language</p> <p>Treating the Welsh language no less favourably</p>	<p><i>The proposal will allow for more children to remain in Wales which will support their Welsh culture and identify and support their Welsh language skills</i></p>	<p>None identified at this point</p>	<p>Ensure that workforce is trained in the Welsh active offer</p>
<p>Operational</p> <p>Recruitment & Training of workforce</p>	<p><i>Any recruitment activity as a result of the proposal will be shared in Welsh. There are Welsh language learning opportunities for the workforce and some training is offered in Welsh medium. Consideration will be given as to Welsh speakers are specifically required depending on the needs of children who are looked after.</i></p>	<p>None identified at this point</p>	<p>None identified at this point</p>
<p>Service delivery</p> <p>Use of Welsh language in service delivery</p> <p>Promoting use of the language</p>	<p>We will continue to ensure that the Welsh active offer is made for all children and their families who require services.</p>	<p>None identified at this point</p>	<p>Continue to promote the use of Welsh and Welsh language skills within the service</p>




4. Does your proposal deliver any of the well-being goals below? Please explain the impact (positive and negative) you expect, together with suggestions of how to mitigate negative impacts or better contribute to the goal. There's no need to put something in every box if it is not relevant!



Well Being Goal	Does the proposal contribute to this goal? Describe the positive and negative impacts.	What actions have been/will be taken to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
A prosperous Wales Efficient use of resources, skilled, educated people, generates wealth, provides jobs	The proposal seeks to support young people who are care experienced to develop the skills and personal resilience required to live prosperously	Further development of supported living accommodation
A resilient Wales Maintain and enhance biodiversity and land, river and coastal ecosystems that support resilience and can adapt to change (e.g. climate change)	None identified at this point	None identified at this point
A healthier Wales People's physical and mental wellbeing is maximized and health impacts are understood	The proposal seeks to support children who are looked after and care experienced young people to develop healthy lifestyles and to be placed in safe and nurturing environments that support their overall physical and emotional health. The development of increased in-house placement options supports an integrated approach to ensure that children's needs are met.	Further development of placements and support services available to carers and children
A Wales of cohesive communities Communities are attractive, viable, safe and well connected	The proposal recognises that children and young people particularly those with more complex needs are often those who are placed away from their homes and communities, and sometimes outside of Wales. This is disruptive and potentially damaging to the young persons long-term needs and sense of belonging. The placement seeks to address this by developing placements where children can be closer to their homes and communities.	Further development of in-county placements and the support services available.

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Well Being Goal	Does the proposal contribute to this goal? Describe the positive and negative impacts.	What actions have been/will be taken to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
A globally responsible Wales Taking account of impact on global well-being when considering local social, economic and environmental wellbeing	None identified at this point	None identified at this point
A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language Culture, heritage and Welsh language are promoted and protected. People are encouraged to do sport, art and recreation	The proposal recognises that children and young people particularly those with more complex needs are often those who are placed away from their homes and communities, and sometimes outside of Wales. This is disruptive and potentially damaging to the young persons long-term needs and sense of belonging. The placement seeks to address this by developing placements where children can be closer to their homes and communities.	Further development of in-county placements and the support services available.
A more equal Wales People can fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances	The proposal seeks to address some of the disadvantages experienced by children and young people who are looked after by providing them with the right services and support to allow them to overcome early adversity and go on to lead fulfilled lives as adult citizens.	Further development of in-county placements and the support services available.

5. How has your proposal embedded and prioritised the sustainable governance principles in its development?

Sustainable Development Principle	Does your proposal demonstrate you have met this principle? If yes, describe how. If not explain why.	Are there any additional actions to be taken to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
 <p>Long Term</p> <p>Balancing short term need with long term and planning for the future</p>	<p>The proposal is focused on developing sustainable support and accommodation services for children who are looked after</p>	<p>None identified at this point</p>
 <p>Collaboration</p> <p>Working together with other partners to deliver objectives</p>	<p>The proposal includes working together with a range of partners at a local and regional level, including the other Gwent LAs, Foster Wales, Regional Social Landlords and not-for-profit organisations.</p>	<p>None identified at this point</p>
 <p>Involvement</p> <p>Involving those with an interest and seeking their views</p>	<p>The views, wishes and feelings of Children and young people are at the centre of their care planning, and are always taken in to account. The proposal seeks to ensure that children have increased and better options in terms of their personal goals including where and with whom they want to live.</p> <p><i>Who are the stakeholders who will be affected by your proposal? Have they been involved? Do those people reflect the diversity of the area which is served?</i></p>	<p>Children have the right to independent advocacy – the service needs to ensure that training is up to date so that all practitioners are aware and support an active offer of advocacy.</p>

Sustainable Development Principle	Does your proposal demonstrate you have met this principle? If yes, describe how. If not explain why.	Are there any additional actions to be taken to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
 <p>Prevention</p> <p>Putting resources into preventing problems occurring or getting worse</p>	<p>The proposal supports the on-going development of preventative family support and support for care experienced young people</p>	<p>None identified at this point</p>
 <p>Integration</p> <p>Considering impact on all wellbeing goals together and on other bodies</p>	<p>. The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014, requires local authorities to provide a range of services designed to promote all aspects of wellbeing (as defined by the Act) and prevent the need for care and support. The proposal is made in accordance with and in partnership with the Regional Partnership Board and together with Foster Wales and the WG programme board for eliminating</p>	<p>None identified at this point</p>

6. Council has agreed the need to consider the impact its decisions has on the following important responsibilities: Corporate Parenting and Safeguarding. Are your proposals going to affect any of these responsibilities?

	Describe any positive impacts your proposal has	Describe any negative impacts your proposal has	What will you do/ have you done to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
Safeguarding	Children's safeguarding needs are prioritised in their placements and care planning	<i>None identified at this point .Safeguarding is about ensuring that everything is in place to promote the well-being of children and vulnerable adults, preventing them from being harmed and protecting those</i>	None identified at this point
Corporate Parenting	This proposal supports the work of the corporate parenting board in ensuring that the council works to get the best outcomes for children and young people who are looked after and care experienced young people through the development of placements and support accommodation	None identified at this point	None identified at this point

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7. What evidence and data has informed the development of your proposal?

This will include your baseline position, measures and studies that have informed your thinking and the recommendation you are making. It should allow you to identify whether any changes resulting from the implementation of the recommendation have had a positive or negative effect. Data sources include for example:

- Quantitative data - data that provides numerical information, e.g. population figures, number of users/non-users
- Qualitative data – data that furnishes evidence of people's perception/views of the service/policy, e.g. analysis of complaints, outcomes of focus groups, surveys
- Local population data including the census figures
- Household survey data
- Service User Data e.g. from My Monmouthshire, FLO, PLANT, Mayrise, ONE etc
- Evidence and data from Monmouthshire's Well-being Assessment
- Recommendations from Scrutiny or following consultation
- Comparisons with similar policies in other authorities
- Academic publications, research reports, consultants' reports, and reports on any consultation with e.g. trade unions or the voluntary and community sectors
 - Equalities dashboard link. [Equality data dashboard for EQIA's 2020.xlsx](#)

Data includes – placement types and numbers of children who are looked after gathered through PLANT

8. SUMMARY: As a result of completing this form, what are the main positive and negative impacts of your proposal, how have they informed/changed the development of the proposal so far and what will you be doing in future?

.This section should summarise the key issues arising from the evaluation. This summary must be included in the Committee report template

It is a statutory requirement to provide appropriate and sufficient placements for children who are looked after that meet their holistic needs. National shortages of placements lead to some children being inappropriately placed and separated from home and communities – this affects children with more complex needs disproportionately. The proposal seeks to address this through the further development of placements, particularly those within Monmouthshire.

The proposal is expected to have a positive impact on care-planning and placement provision for children who are looked after and care experienced children.

9. ACTIONS: As a result of completing this form are there any further actions you will be undertaking? Please detail them below, if applicable.

What are you going to do	When are you going to do it?	Who is responsible
Acquire suitable properties that can provide residential placements and 16+ accommodation schemes	By March 2025	Jane Rodgers
Develop an in-house residential service to provide care and support	By March 2025	Jane Rodgers

10. VERSION CONTROL: The Equality and Future Generations Evaluation should be used at the earliest stage, such as informally within your service, and then further developed throughout the decision making process. It is important to keep a record of this process to demonstrate how you have considered and built in equality and future generations considerations wherever possible.

Version No.	Decision making stage	Date considered	Brief description of any amendments made following consideration

	<i>e.g. budget mandate, DMT, SLT, Scrutiny, Cabinetetc</i>		

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SUBJECT:	Strategic Equality Plan
MEETING:	People Scrutiny Committee
DATE:	6th February 2024
DIVISIONS/WARDS AFFECTED:	All

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To provide the committee with the opportunity shape the development of the authority's Strategic Equality Plan and objectives for the period 2024-28.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the committee undertake pre-decision scrutiny of the evidence, objectives and actions within the draft strategic equality plan to inform its development prior to it being presented to Council on 29th February.

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 Tackling inequality is one of the council's biggest priorities as set out in the Community and Corporate Plan. It is vital that we value and make the most of the abilities and contributions of everyone in our communities, irrespective of age, gender, race, sexual orientation of any of the other characteristics that make us who we are. It is also a legal requirement placed on us by the Equality Act 2010.

- 3.2 The Act protects people from unlawful discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. It covers 9 protected characteristics: Age, Disability, Gender reassignment, Marriage and civil partnership, Pregnancy and maternity, Race, Religion or belief, Sex and Sexual orientation.

- 3.3 To ensure transparency, and to assist in the performance of this duty, the Act is underpinned by specific regulations which require public bodies to publish:

- equality objectives, at least every four years
- information to demonstrate their compliance with the public sector equality duty.

It also requires us to have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between disabled people and people who are not disabled, in particular, the need to take steps to take account of disabled persons' requirements.

- 3.4 We also use this plan to better support those who are socio-economically disadvantaged in terms of income and/or status in line with the Socio-economic Duty placed on public bodies in Wales.

- 3.5 Every four years we produce a Strategic Equality Plan setting out what the evidence tells us about inequality in the county, why it matters to us and the actions we'll take to make a difference to people's lives. We use this plan to set our strategic equality objectives. These add greater detail to complement and build on the commitments we have made in the Community and Corporate Plan.

- 3.6 The draft objectives being proposed are:
- Objective 1: Give every child the best start in life.
 - Objective 2: Support the creation of fair employment and good work for everyone.
 - Objective 3: Work with partners and residents to build inclusive and cohesive communities.
 - Objective 4: Expand our provision of community-based services that extend people's healthy life expectancy.
 - Objective 5: Ensure our services are accessible to the public.
 - Objective 6: Ensure we have a diverse workforce and a fully inclusive workplace.
 - Objective 7: Reduce the gender pay gap.
- 3.7 The document attached as appendix one has a section for each of these objectives. Each section contains the same headings:
- why this matters to us;
 - the evidence;
 - the protected characteristics and other factors the objectives will affect; and,
 - the proposed actions we will take.
- 3.8 The final plan will detail the things the authority will do to contribute to national action plans including: The Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan; LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales; Advancing Gender Equality in Wales Action Plan and the Action on Disability action plan
- 3.9 As part of the development of this policy, the committee may wish to consider:
- Is there any additional evidence that we need to take into account?
 - Do you agree with the objectives that have been proposed? If not how it could they improved?
 - Whether the actions identified are the correct ones.
- 3.10 The committee's deliberations and conclusions will be used to shape the document ahead of it being presented to full council on 29th February. This will ensure we are able to meet the legal duty to set objectives no later than 2nd April.

4. EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SOCIAL JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

- 4.1 The objectives and actions within the plan are presented in a way that enables the reader to see the potential impact on groups with protected characteristics. The Strategic Equality Plan is by its very nature a plan that is looking to address, mitigate and positively address identified issues in Monmouthshire that have an adverse impact upon people or groups of people with protected characteristics. The Plan will also have a positive effect on all of the national well-being goals.

5. REASONS:

5.1 To provide the committee with an opportunity to share the development of the document to ensure it captures key evidence and contains objectives that will fulfil the council's statutory duties and policy priorities.

6. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

6.1 At this stage of development the costs of individual actions is not yet known. The intention is that plan can be afforded within the authority's existing budgets. Any requests for additional funding will be subject to individual decisions in accordance with the constitution.

7. CONSULTEES

Cabinet
Strategic Leadership Team

The plan has been developed following two informal sessions with Cabinet and the Strategic Leadership Team which have helped shape the objectives and actions. It is currently open to public consultation. Feedback received will be used, alongside any points raised by this committee, to shape the final document.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None

9. AUTHOR:

Matthew Gatehouse, Chief Officer – People, Performance and Partnerships.

10. CONTACT DETAILS:

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Background to the Consultation

Addressing inequality is one of our biggest priorities. Every four years we produce a Strategic Equality Plan setting out some of the evidence, why it matters to us and the actions we'll take to make a difference to peoples' lives. The plan will also enable us to demonstrate that we are meeting the statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010.

This consultation proposes 7 objectives for the period 2024-28. They have been based on our initial analysis of the evidence. There may be other issues that you think we should take into account. This consultation asks you to give your views on our proposed equality objectives and the actions we will take.

Please complete the survey online here <https://forms.office.com/e/AEfS8aSNbA>

If you prefer, you can print the survey and return it in the post to: Equality and Welsh Language; Monmouthshire County Council; County Hall: The Rhaydr; Usk; Monmouthshire; NP15 1GA.

You can also request a paper version of the survey by e-mailing equality@monmouthshire.gov.uk or calling 01633 644644.

Completed paper copies can be returned to your nearest community hub. Details of locations and opening hours can be found at: <https://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/community-hubs-and-libraries/community-hubs-opening-hours/>

We carry out an evaluation of our progress against our objectives every year. This is considered by one of the council's scrutiny committees. The latest evaluation can be found online at <https://democracy.monmouthshire.gov.uk/>

The Legal Context

The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 protects people from unlawful discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. It covers 9 protected characteristics: Age, Disability, Gender reassignment, Marriage and civil partnership, Pregnancy and maternity, Race, Religion or belief, Sex and Sexual orientation.

It also requires is to have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between disabled people and people who are not disabled, in particular, the need to take steps to take account of disabled persons' requirements.

It also created the Public Sector Equality Duty requiring public bodies to

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

To ensure transparency, and to assist in the performance of this duty, the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011 require public authorities, named on, to publish:

- equality objectives, at least every four years
- information to demonstrate their compliance with the public sector equality duty.

The Socio-economic Duty

The Socio-economic Duty seeks to improve the strategic decision-making of public bodies to better support those who are socio-economically disadvantaged in terms of income and/or status. It puts tackling inequality at the heart of decision-making and builds on the good work public bodies are already doing.

The duty refers to aspects of life 'socio' (your life chances and where you live) and 'economic' (how much money you have for essential and non-essential items).

Inequality can compound negative socio-economic factors. Our Strategic Equality Plan will set out objectives and actions which will help to improve socio-economic outcomes and well as focusing on group with protected characteristics.

Evidence of Inequality

Monmouthshire is geographically large compared to many local authorities in Wales. It is semi-rural in nature, with just over half of the population living in urban areas. The county is often perceived as affluent. However, headline statistics can fail to shine a light on the diversity that exists within our borders.

There are many existing sources of evidence produced in recent years that have been used to inform the development of this plan:

- The Well-being Assessment produced by the Gwent Public Services Board as part of its responsibilities under the Well-being of Future Generations Act
- Building a Fairer Gwent: improving health equity and the social determinants of Health – produced by the Institute of Health Equity
- The Population Needs Assessment - produced under the Social Services and Well-being Act.
- Is Wales Fairer 2023 – a document prepared by the Equality and Human Rights Commission.
- The National Survey for Wales

We've also examined a number of national action plans and strategies which look to advance the equalities agenda including:

- The Anti-Racist Wales Action Planⁱ
- LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Walesⁱⁱ
- Advancing Gender Equality in Wales Action Planⁱⁱⁱ
- Action on Disability action plan^{iv}

We understand that the issues that are highlighted in the above documents are symptoms of complex problems, often at a societal level. They cannot be solved by one organisation alone. Public, third and private sector must work together. Most importantly, we must work with and alongside communities to co-produce sustainable solutions.

We also recognise the importance of intersectionality. Many people possess more than one protected characteristic and systems of inequality based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class and other forms of discrimination intersect.

When you read this document you'll come across evidence that relates to multiple groups but is only shown in one section. We've done this to keep it as concise as possible, but we do recognise the overlapping issues and have taken them into account when proposing actions.

Strategic Equality Objectives

Monmouthshire County Council is committed to tackling inequality and working hard to decarbonise our county. We will work with and alongside our communities to achieve this^y.

It is vital that we value and make the most of the abilities and contributions of everyone in our communities, irrespective of age, gender, race, sexual orientation or any of the other characteristics that make us who we are.

These objectives and the actions outlined on the following pages are the things that we are committed to delivering over the next four years to ensure that everyone in our county is able to achieve their full potential.

- **Objective 1:** Give every child the best start in life.
- **Objective 2:** Support the creation of fair employment and good work for everyone.
- **Objective 3:** Work with partners and residents to build inclusive and cohesive communities.
- **Objective 4:** Expand our provision of community-based services that extend people's healthy life expectancy.
- **Objective 5:** Ensure our services are accessible to the public.
- **Objective 6:** Ensure we have a diverse workforce and a fully inclusive workplace.
- **Objective 7:** Reduce the gender pay gap.

Each of the sections below describes why the objective matters to us; lists some of the evidence that has informed the development of the plan and the actions that we propose to take. It also indicates which of the groups possessing protected characteristics will benefit directly from the activity. We have opted for objectives that will make a positive difference across multiple protected characteristics rather than having separate objectives for each group.

There are a series of consultation questions relating to each section.

- Is there any additional evidence that we need to take into account?
- Do you agree with the objective we have set? If not please indicate how it could be improved
- Do you agree with the actions we've identified?
- If there are actions you do not agree with or want to suggest things that we haven't included please let us know here

If you don't want to answer all of these individually, that's fine. Just use the free text box at the end to share your thoughts. There are also some more general questions including ones related to the Welsh language.

1. Give every child the best start in life

Why This Matters

The experiences we have in our childhoods have a huge impact on how we grow and develop, our physical and mental health, and our thoughts, feelings and behaviour. Research shows that it is associated with performance at school, future work outcomes and leads to higher income, better lifelong health and longer life expectancy.

Evidence

- Research shows that the first thousand days from pregnancy to age two offer a crucial window of opportunity to affect the future outcomes for children.
- Low birth weight is a predictor of a number of negative outcomes including lower life expectancy and educational attainment. Monmouthshire has the smallest percentage of low birthweight babies in Wales, 4.9% compared to a Wales average of 6.1%.
- There are issues with limited availability of early years providers accross Gwent. Since 2020 Monmouthshire has lost 305 childcare spaces, 9% of its total.
- 27% of children in Monmouthshire live in poverty. This is the same as the UK average but below the Wales average of 34%.
- In Wales there are a range of disparities between the attainment of different ethnic groups at the foundation phase of primary education.
- Children who identify as neither a boy nor a girl are more likely to be bullied than those who identify as either a boy or a girl.
- Referrals to child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) in Monmouthshire grew by 89% between 2020-21 and 2021-22. This is higher than the 39% rise across Wales. Wales also has the highest rate of any of the UK nations.
- Secondary school attendance has declined since the pandemic, we have also seen a rise in the number of exclusions from school.
- Children who are eligible for free school meals have lower levels of attainment that those who are not eligible.

This objective is related to:

Age	x	Religion or belief	
Disability	x	Sex	
Gender reassignment	x	Sexual orientation	x
Marriage or civil partnership		Welsh Language	x
Pregnancy or maternity		Poverty	x

Race			
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Actions we will take to address this:

- Work with partners across the Gwent Public Services Board, including Public Health and the NHS to embed actions to reduce health inequalities in early years services.
- Continue the roll out of universal free school meals.
- Poverty proof our schools to reduce the cost of the school day, recognising that every pound matters to many families.
- Ensure that every Monmouthshire school identifies a senior leader responsible for tackling poverty and raising the achievement of vulnerable learners.
- Develop a new Additional Learning Needs Strategy and related toolkits and resources, focusing on positive behavioural support.
- Continue taking a preventative approach to reducing school absences through the Emotionally Based School Avoidance programme for school leadership.
- Improve access to, and use of, data gathered by schools concerning bullying, harassment and discrimination.
- Provide an LGBTQ+ inclusive education through the Relationships and Sexuality Education section of the Curriculum for Wales.
- Work with others to increase childcare provision and quality in areas of higher deprivation with aim of reducing inequalities.

**1. Give every child the best start in life:
Consultation Questions**

- 1a. Is there any additional evidence that we need to take into account?
- 1b. Do you agree with the objective we have set?
- 1c. If not please indicate how it could be improved.
- 1d. Do you agree with the actions we've identified?
- 1e. If there are actions you do not agree with or want to suggest things that we haven't included please let us know.

2. Support the creation of fair employment and good work for everyone

Why This Matters

Most people spend a substantial part of their time at work and this a significant part of their life. The job people do, and how valued they feel, is a powerful determinant of their quality of life. As well as the obvious financial effects, being unemployed can have long-lasting negative effects on health and wellbeing. It increases mortality and is a significant driver of inequalities in physical and mental health.

Evidence

- Between September 2022 and January 2023, 92% of people in Wales said their cost of living had increased in the past year.
- Disabled people are consistently much less likely to be employed than non-disabled people. The employment of disabled people in Monmouthshire fell from 60% in 2014 to 51% in 2023.
- Across Wales, disabled workers' median hourly earnings have stagnated while non-disabled workers' earnings have grown.
- Disabled people are more likely to be living in poverty and severe material deprivation. However, there has been a significant decrease in the proportion of disabled people living in severe material deprivation, from 40.5% in 2015/16 to 24.3% in 2019/20
- In Wales, ethnic minority workers are more likely to be in insecure employment (8.0%) than White British workers (14.2%). However, this gap in insecure employment has narrowed over time.
- Gay and lesbian adults are more likely to be employed (67%) than adults who identify as heterosexual (55%), bisexual (52%) or any other sexual orientation.
- The 2021 census found employment rates in Wales are higher among individuals whose gender identity was the same as their sex registered at birth (54.5%) than among those whose gender identity was different from their sex registered at birth.
- At 39% the proportion of women working part-time in Wales is far higher the proportion of men which is 12%.
- Rural communities can be more prone to poverty than urban areas with fuel poverty and access to services a particular problem.

This objective is related to:

Age	x	Religion or belief	x
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Disability	x	Sex	x
Gender reassignment	x	Sexual orientation	x
Marriage or civil partnership	x	Welsh Language	x
Pregnancy or maternity	x	Poverty	x
Race	x		

Actions we will take to address this:

- Encourage local firms to become accredited disability confident employers.
- Ensure our tender documentation to encourage and promote diversity amongst our suppliers and contractors.
- Deliver employability programmes and build partnerships with employers and local businesses.
- Maintain a sustainable and accessible public bus network (including community transport) that serves our town centres.
- Offer networking, signposting and, where appropriate, grant funding opportunities to support diversification of rural businesses.
- Provide support for the creation of 6,240 sustainable job opportunities.
- Eradicate period poverty and promote period dignity.

2. Support the creation of fair employment and good work for everyone: Consultation Questions

- 2a. Is there any additional evidence that we need to take into account?
- 2c. Do you agree with the objective we have set?
- 2c. If not please indicate how it could be improved.
- 2d. Do you agree with the actions we've identified?
- 2e. If there are actions you do not agree with or want to suggest things that we haven't included please let us know.

3. Work with partners and residents to build inclusive and cohesive communities

Why This Matters

Community cohesion can be undermined if some groups have different experiences or outcomes to others. This is especially true when it's as a result of a group's protected characteristics. The issues that undermine cohesion can be deep-rooted. We want to create and maintain the conditions in which local communities can flourish.

Evidence

- 73% of people who identified as heterosexual or straight felt they belong to their local area, compared with 63% who did not identify as heterosexual or straight;
- 83% of men felt safe when: at home, walking, on public transport, and in their car all, compared with 58% of women;
- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people have the worst outcomes of any ethnic group in Wales across a huge range of areas including education, health, employment, criminal justice and hate crime;
- In 2021/22, police forces in Wales recorded 6,295 hate crimes, an increase from 4,654 in 2020/21;
- The proportion of Monmouthshire residents identifying as from an Asian ethnic group is 1.3%, from a Black ethnic group was 0.2% from a mixed or multiple ethnic group was 1.2%; from a white group it was 96.7% with other groups making up 0.3%^{vi};
- The proportion of disabled people reporting experiencing domestic abuse in the past 12 months is around three times greater than that reported by non-disabled people;
- Research indicates that childcare remains a particular and unchanging barrier to accessing English classes for speakers of other languages (ESOL), particularly for female asylum seekers and refugees in Wales.
- Between 2011 and 2021, the average (median) age of Monmouthshire's increased by four years, from 45 to 49 years of age;
- Monmouthshire's population aged 65 and over is projected to increase by 41% and, more significantly, those aged 85 and over by 96% by 2043.

This objective is related to:

Age	x	Religion or belief	x
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Disability	x	Sex	x
Gender reassignment	x	Sexual orientation	x
Marriage or civil partnership	x	Welsh Language	x
Pregnancy or maternity	x	Poverty	x
Race	x		

Actions we will take to address this:

- Celebrate diversity and hold awareness raising events;
- Support and enable the creation of community groups to ensure everyone has a voice and is able to participate and help shape the future of our county;
- Become an age friendly county and seek accreditation from the World Health Organisation;
- Work with partners to tackle violence against women and girls and domestic and sexual violence;
- Ensure that we have a clear pathway for those with no recourse to public funds;
- Improve our use of data analysis and CCTV to prevent crimes and provide evidence to the police when they do take place;
- Improve housing support for refugees and asylum seekers;
- Become an accredited county of sanctuary and a place of sanctuary for LGBTQ+ migrants.

**3. Work with partners and residents to build inclusive and cohesive communities:
Consultation Questions**

- 3a. Is there any additional evidence that we need to take into account?
- 3b. Do you agree with the objective we have set?
- 3c. If not please indicate how it could be improved.
- 3d. Do you agree with the actions we've identified?
- 3e. If there are actions you do not agree with or want to suggest things that we haven't included please let us know.

4. Expand our provision of community-based services that extend people's healthy life expectancy

Why This Matters

Health inequalities often result from social inequalities. There are huge differences in healthy life expectancy between people living in different communities and clear socio-economic inequalities in behaviours such as eating, exercising and drinking. Alongside this, rising fuel and housing costs are further reducing the available funds for a healthy diet.

Evidence

- Healthy life expectancy for males is 69.8 years, which is the highest in Wales, and 70.7 years for females;
- Those living in the least deprived areas of Monmouthshire expected to live longer than those in the most deprived, by on average 6.3 years for males and 3.6 years for females. Similarly, those in the least deprived parts of Monmouthshire are likely to live in good health for longer, by an average of 10.1 years for males and 11.1 years for females;
- Families with the lowest 10% of household income would have to spend nearly three-quarters of their entire income (after housing costs) to afford the recommended healthy NHS Eatwell plate;
- In 2021/22, 42% of adults with a longstanding illness, disability or infirmity participated in at least one sport or physical activity compared with 68% who did not have a longstanding illness, disability or infirmity;

This objective is related to:

Age	x	Religion or belief	x
Disability	x	Sex	x
Gender reassignment	x	Sexual orientation	x
Marriage or civil partnership	x	Welsh Language	
Pregnancy or maternity	x	Poverty	x
Race	x		

Actions we will take to address this:

- Work with partners across the Gwent Public Services Board, including Public Health and the NHS to embed actions to reduce health inequalities in early years services^{vii}.
- Ensure new walking and cycling infrastructure reaches areas with the lowest rates of physical activity.
- Continue to provide a broad range of opportunities for people to be healthy and active including the National Exercise Referral Scheme.

3. Work with partners and residents to build inclusive and cohesive communities:

4. Expand our provision of community-based services that extend people's healthy life expectancy.

Consultation Questions

- 4a. Is there any additional evidence that we need to take into account?
- 4b. Do you agree with the objective we have set?
- 4c. If not please indicate how it could be improved.
- 4d. Do you agree with the actions we've identified?
- 4e. If there are actions you do not agree with or want to suggest things that we haven't included please let us know.

5. Ensure our services are accessible to the public

Why This Matters

Public services play a vital role in the lives of tens of thousands of people very day. Many people face barriers accessing the things they need. This can be physical, like buildings not having accessible toilets, they can be caused by how we present information so not everyone can process it, or it may be people's attitudes to difference.

Evidence

- Only 24% of those aged over 70 are likely to use digital technology to support their health compared to 87% of people aged 16–19.
- Public and private return travel times to services such as doctors' surgeries, libraries or leisure centres in Monmouthshire are higher than the Wales average in every category except one^{viii};
- 7.3% of Monmouthshire residents were identified as being disabled and limited a lot^{ix};
- Young Carers re more likely than others of their age to live in deprived areas and experience disruption to their education^x.

This objective is related to:

Age	x	Religion or belief	
Disability	x	Sex	
Gender reassignment	x	Sexual orientation	
Marriage or civil partnership		Welsh Language	x
Pregnancy or maternity		Poverty	x
Race			

Actions we will take to address this:

- Continue to ensure our public buildings are fully accessible to all service users;
- Work with others to improve the provision of accessible toilets in our town centres;
- Ensure that all communications are accessible, including recognising the needs of neurodiverse people;
- Ensure we use the social model of disability when developing new services and reconfiguring existing ones;

- Promote courses to raise digital skills and literacy amongst all groups through community education courses and our community hubs;
- Increase the number of Welsh speakers employed by the council to improve access;
- Promote the active offer of language choice in social care;
- Ensure that training on equalities is available to all staff and councillors to improve inclusive decision-making.

5. Ensure our services are accessible to the public:

Consultation Questions

- 5a. Is there any additional evidence that we need to take into account?
- 5b. Do you agree with the objective we have set?
- 5c. If not please indicate how it could be improved.
- 5d. Do you agree with the actions we've identified?
- 5e. If there are actions you do not agree with or want to suggest things that we haven't included please let us know.

6. Ensure we have a diverse workforce and a fully inclusive workplace

Why This Matters

When employees trust that they will be treated fairly regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation or age, they are more likely to be happy and productive in their roles. Having an inclusive and accessible workplace helps attract a diverse pool of talent and ensures the organisation can retain the diverse talent we already have.

Evidence

- Data to be added.

This objective is related to:

Age	x	Religion or belief	x
Disability	x	Sex	x
Gender reassignment	x	Sexual orientation	x
Marriage or civil partnership		Welsh Language	x
Pregnancy or maternity		Poverty	
Race	x		

Actions we will take to address this:

- Ensure that we attain disability confident level 2 status within the first year of this plan and then work towards levels 3;
- Put in place measures to support and accommodate the needs of neurodiverse colleagues;
- Actively target recruitment opportunities towards groups who are under-represented in our workforce;
- Address the data gaps that exist across all protected characteristics and disaggregate data by across policy areas.

**6. Ensure we have a diverse workforce and a fully inclusive workplace:
Consultation Questions**

- 6a. Is there any additional evidence that we need to take into account?
- 6b. Do you agree with the objective we have set?
- 6c. If not please indicate how it could be improved.
- 6d. Do you agree with the actions we've identified?
- 6e. If there are actions you do not agree with or want to suggest things that we haven't included please let us know.

7. Reduce the gender pay gap

Why This Matters

The gender pay gap has wide implications for society. It affects women's pension contributions and results in a higher incidence of poverty and social exclusion in later life.

Evidence

- 89.1% of single-parent households in Wales are headed by women and are the most likely to be living in poverty.^{xi}
- The proportion of women working part-time in Wales remains far higher (39.0% in 2022) than the proportion of men (12.1%)
- The pay gap between men and women persists, as women are on average paid 14.1% less than men in Wales. However, this gap has narrowed slightly between 2010 and 2019.
- Average female weekly pay in the county of Monmouthshire is £559 compared to £633 for males.
- Research by the Equality and Human Rights Commission highlighted that childcare needs and caring responsibilities continue to be a significant barrier to gender equality in employment and education.

This is related to:

Age		Religion or belief	
Disability		Sex	x
Gender reassignment		Sexual orientation	
Marriage or civil partnership		Welsh Language	
Pregnancy or maternity		Poverty	x
Race			

Actions we will take to address this:

- Ensure that career pathways do not limit the ability of part-time staff to progress into senior roles;
- Continue to operate a transparent job evaluation scheme to ensure equitable pay rates;
- Publish information on the gender pay gap annually.

**7. Reduce the gender pay gap:
Consultation Questions**

- 7a. Is there any additional evidence that we need to take into account?
- 7b. Do you agree with the objective we have set?
- 7c. If not please indicate how it could be improved.
- 7d. Do you agree with the actions we've identified?
- 7e. If there are actions you do not agree with or want to suggest things that we haven't included please let us know.

Other Consultation Questions

Thank you for taking the time to read our consultation. Details of how to respond are shown on page 1.

We will use the things you've told us to develop our next Strategic Equality Plan and we will publish this at the end of March. You'll be able to see a summary of the consultation findings at <https://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/consultations/>

8. Is there anything else you would like to tell us to help shape the development of this plan? This can be as much or as little as you like.

9. What, in your opinion, would be the likely effects of the proposals on the Welsh language? We are particularly interested in any likely effects on opportunities to use the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English.

- Do you think that there are opportunities to promote any positive effects?
- Do you think that there are opportunities to mitigate any adverse effects?

10. In your opinion, could the proposals be formulated or changed so as to:

- have positive effects or more positive effects on using the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English; or
- mitigate any negative effects on using the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English?

Sources

ⁱ <https://www.gov.wales/anti-racist-wales-action-plan>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.gov.wales/lgbtq-action-plan-wales>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.gov.wales/advancing-gender-equality-action-plan>

^{iv} <https://www.gov.wales/action-disability-right-independent-living-framework-and-action-plan>

^v Monmouthshire County Council, Community and Corporate Plan 2022-28.

^{vi} Office for National Statistics, Census 2021,

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/W06000021/>

^{vii} Along with other members of Gwent Public Services Board we are committed to becoming a Marmot Region. Details of the Marmot principles can be found in Building a Fairer Gwent (2023),

<https://www.instituteoftheequity.org/resources-reports/building-a-fairer-gwent-improving-health-equity-and-the-social-determinants/main-report.pdf>

^{viii} Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/welsh-indexmultiple-deprivation/?lang=en>

^{ix} Office for National Statistics, Census 2021,

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/W06000021/>

^x Equality and Human Rights Monitor 2023: Is Wales Fairer? (ibid)

^{xi} Equality and Human Rights Monitor 2023: Is Wales Fairer? <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/our-work/equality-and-human-rights-monitor/equality-and-human-rights-monitor-2023-wales-fairer>

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