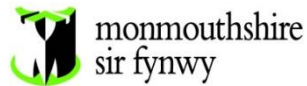


Public Document Pack



County Hall
Rhadyr
Usk
NP15 1GA

Monday, 13 April 2026

Notice of meeting

Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee

**Tuesday, 21st April, 2026 at 10.00 am,
The Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA**

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. 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 If you would like to speak under the Public Open Forum at an upcoming meeting you will need to give three working days' notice in advance of the meeting 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. Alternatively, if you would like to submit a written, audio or video representation, please contact the team via the same email address to arrange this. The deadline for submitting representations to the Council is 5pm three clear working days in advance of the meeting. If combined representations received exceed 30 minutes, a selection of these based on theme will be shared at the meeting. All representations received will be made available to councillors prior to the meeting. 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 Children's Placements - 12 month update - To update the committee following scrutiny in April 2025.	1 - 10
5.	Investment and Commercial Interests Update - 12 month update - To update the committee following scrutiny in April 2025.	11 - 22
6.	Council and Cabinet Work Planner.	23 - 26
7.	Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee Work Programme and Action List.	27 - 32
8.	To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting.	33 - 42
9.	Next Meeting: 9th June 2026 at 10.00am.	

Paul Matthews

Chief Executive

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL CYNGOR SIR FYNWY

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE COMMITTEE IS AS FOLLOWS:

County Councillor Jill Bond, West End;, Welsh Labour/Llafur Cymru
County Councillor Rachel Buckler, Devauden;, Welsh Conservative Party
County Councillor John Crook, Magor East with Undy;, Welsh Labour/Llafur Cymru
County Councillor Steven Garratt, Overmonnow;, Welsh Labour/Llafur Cymru
County Councillor Meirion Howells, Llanbadoc & Usk;, Independent
County Councillor Alistair Neill, Gobion Fawr;, Welsh Conservative Party
County Councillor Martin Newell, Town;, Welsh Conservative Party
County Councillor Paul Pavia, Mount Pleasant;, Welsh Conservative Party
County Councillor Peter Strong, Rogiet;, Welsh Labour/Llafur Cymru
Clare Werrett

Public Information

Please note that Monmouthshire County Council will film this meeting and it will be made available to view in live and archive form online. It is possible that the public seating areas could be filmed and by entering the Chamber you are consenting to being filmed and to the possible use of those images and sound recordings for webcasting purposes. If you make a representation to the meeting you will be deemed to have consented to being filmed.

Recordings of the meeting will be stored in accordance with the Council's data retention policy. Archived webcasts or parts of webcasts shall only be removed from the Council's website if the Monitoring Officer considers that it is necessary because all or part of the content of the webcast is or is likely to be in breach of any statutory provision or common law doctrine, for example Data Protection and Human Rights legislation or provisions relating to confidential or exempt 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.

Public Open Forum

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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.

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Aims and Values of Monmouthshire County Council

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.

Kindness: We will show kindness to all those we work with putting the importance of relationships and the connections we have with one another at the heart of all interactions.

Role of the Pre-meeting

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?
- Agree the order of questioning and which Members will lead
 - Agree questions for officers and questions for the Cabinet Member

Questions for the Meeting

Scrutinising Performance

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?

Scrutinising Policy

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...

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Agenda Item 4

SUBJECT: Progress update in the development of children’s residential and 16+ supported accommodation placements

MEETING: Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 21st April 2026

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 This report sets out the progress made in the development of in-house children’s residential and 16+ Supported Accommodation placements.
- 1.2 The strategy for developing placements was endorsed by the council on Thursday 18th April 2024. It was agreed that there would be 6-monthly / regular updates provided to Committee, the first of these having been presented on 8th October 2024 and the second on 29th April 2025.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

For Committee to scrutinise the progress made against the objectives of the strategy report presented to council 18th April 2024

3. KEY ISSUES

Context

- 3.1 Placement sufficiency for Children Looked After has been an ongoing issue. The number of children Looked After has increased locally, as well as nationally, over the last 10 years and provision has not grown sufficiently to meet this demand. This has resulted in more children residing outside of our county boundaries. Shortages in available placements has meant that we have not always been able to match children’s specific needs with the optimal placement for them. There has also been an over-reliance on the private “for profit” market.
- 3.2 Whilst we continue to work in partnership with Housing colleagues and Registered Social Landlords to support the transition of Children Looked After into supported accommodation post 16 years, this provision is limited, which has resulted in young people becoming ‘blocked’ in children’s placements and not receiving the support required to transition into independence.
- 3.3 There is an unfailing commitment to the recruitment and retention of in-house foster carers. As part of our placement development work, the financial and support offer to in-house carers has been enhanced which has resulted in a recent uptick in the number of carers going through the approval process. However, the number of Local Authority foster carers is not increasing at a rate sufficient to meet our needs. Monmouthshire continues to have a reliance on commissioning “for profit” foster placements for children from independent fostering agencies (IFAs). This is addressed within the Council’s fostering strategy and is not an area of focus within this report.
- 3.4 The Health and Social Care (Wales) Act 2025 was passed by Senedd and received Royal Assent in March 2025. This means that the elimination of profit from the care of children who are looked after is now enshrined in law. As it currently stands, from April 2026, it will no longer be possible in Wales to register as a ‘for-profit’ provider, and from April 2030 it will be illegal to make new placements for children with a ‘for-profit’ provider. Local Authorities and the not-for-profit sector have made progress in developing placements in light of the legislative changes; however, not yet at the speed or scale that is required to ensure sufficiency by 2030.
- 3.5 The private ‘for profit’ provider market has become significantly destabilised following the Welsh Government’s policy direction and subsequent legislative changes. The destabilisation of the

market has further decreased the sufficiency of IFA and residential placements, resulting in increased costs of placements and the number of unregulated homes operating, also at increased cost.

Placement Development Strategy

- 3.6 On April 18th, 2024, the council endorsed the Children Services' strategy to respond to the current external context and the challenges associated with the provision of children's placements. The strategy sought to set out the pathway for increasing the availability of in-house residential and supported accommodation placements in a way which was both sustainable; would better meet the needs of Monmouthshire children and young people; and would decrease the Council's dependency on an uncertain provider market.
- 3.7 Predicted numbers of additional placements required to meet demand were based on current trends and numbers of children looked after at that time (April 2024). The strategy also took account of the placements that the service had already in the pipeline, i.e. 4 bespoke therapeutic placements via two, 2-bed residential children's homes, one in the North of the county and one in the South.
- 3.8 The policy laid out a requirement for the development of:
- Residential Placements – 12 additional placements via standard 3 -4 bed residential homes;
 - Bespoke Therapeutic – 2 additional placements required - via 1 small 2-bed home;
 - Supported Accommodation for 16plus - 20 additional placements required.
- 3.9 Since the original strategy we have continued to review and update our commissioning and placement sufficiency needs. This has led us, at this point in time, to reduce the target number of placements across all 3 types of provision to 8 (residential) 4 (therapeutic) and 13 / 14 (supported accommodation). This adjustment is attributable to a number of factors including:
- The number of children looked after has stabilised and shows a slight decline;
 - Preventative services are helping to safely reduce the number of children in care;
 - We are making marginal gains with the number of in-house fostering placements;
 - We have developed specific accommodation for UASC via an alternative service model.
- 3.10 Under the new Act there is a requirement to ensure on-going sufficiency planning. Given the on-going demand and complexity of children's presenting issues, Children's Services will continue to plan and review our sufficiency needs, taking into account the availability of placements as well as the specific and individual needs of children currently within the service. Predicting demand remains a challenging and dynamic process, complicated by uncertainty within the care market nationwide, as well as consideration regarding the length of time that it can take to bring projects into operation.
- 3.11 In respect of the provision of the care element for residential children's homes, 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. The preferred approach agreed was to allow for both options to be pursued depending on the individual project. In respect of the Supported Accommodation provision, the preferred route for providing the care, was via a procurement process.
- 3.12 With regard to the accommodation element, the council endorsed proposals to develop in-house residential and 16+ supported accommodation by looking to repurpose existing assets in the first instance. Where re-purposing is not viable, the Council endorsed the acquisition of suitable property or land for the development of residential placements or supported accommodation subject to appropriate business cases and cabinet approval.

- 3.13 The council extended the borrowing headroom of up to £3 million to support direct acquisition of suitable properties subject to agreed business cases, and only in the event that grant money was not available. To date we have not had to draw down on this borrowing headroom.
- 3.14 Scott Hereford joined the service in August 2024 as the Residential and Resource Service Manager to lead on this area of work.

Residential and Supported Accommodation Developments

- 3.15 **Property 1 in Caldicot, 16+ Supported Accommodation for up to 5 young people** (Business Case Agreed by Cabinet – 22nd May 2024).

Following the update in October 2024, the planned refurbishment works were completed on the 15th November 2024. The home has been sympathetically designed and furnished to create a homely environment for the young people. Whilst not required to be Registered with Care Inspectorate Wales, the accommodation meets regulation standards. The refurbishment works procured by the normal council arrangements and as per the conditions of the Housing with Care Fund (HCF) grant.

- 3.16 The procurement process for the support element was completed and a service provider appointed on the 17th of September 2024. An Open Day was carried out on the 31st of October 2024, where Children's Services teams, local councilors from Caldicot, the Cabinet member for Health and Social Care, and local neighbours were invited to explore the home and to explain the ethos and purpose of the service.

- 3.17 The service commenced November 24th in keeping with the target opening date originally identified. Following opening, 4 young people moved into the home over a 6-week transition period. Since then, 2 young people have moved-on, and 2 new young people have moved-in. The 2 young people who moved, are now residing in provisions with lower levels of support.

- 3.18 All 4 young people residing in the property have settled in well and are working towards achieving their goals, which includes the following:

- Budgeting/managing their finances
- Food shopping and cooking skills
- Independently travelling
- Housekeeping
- Sourcing seeking college and employment opportunities
- Positive decision making.

- 3.19 Oversight of the service contract is undertaken monthly with the management group comprising of Children's Services Managers and Managers from the provider organisation. The monthly meetings review the young people's placements with the aim of resolving any issues / challenges that may arise.

- 3.20 A Referral Panel is established, which has proven to be the most effective way for reviewing and discussing the suitability for a potential placement at the home. Within this forum the panel consider the care planning of the Social Work teams and the short, mid, and long-term outcomes for the young people. This supports the joint working of all parties and agencies to work together to support the young person to achieve their goals and aspirations.

- 3.21 The formal contract monitoring process has commenced with Children Services, the provider and Children's Services Commissioning Officer.

- 3.22 The property was an existing Council asset, so no funding was required to support an acquisition. A Housing with Care Fund Grant (HCF) application was submitted in April 2024 for £300,000 to cover the costs of the refurbishment. This comprised £220,000 for build costs, £30,000 for fees and £50,000 for furnishings and fittings. The grant application was successful, and the project was delivered within its allocated budget. The revenue costs of the project are being met through core budget as per the business case (i.e. the existing costs of care packages were transferred to the

new project as the young people moved in). The expected savings identified in the business case were realised and contributed to the service's savings mandate 24/25.

3.23 Property in Monmouth, a registered children's home for up to 4 children aged under 16 years, (Business Case Agreed by Cabinet 6th March 2024).

Following the April 2025 update, the planned refurbishment works were completed in July 2025. The home has been thoughtfully redesigned to create a warm, welcoming, and family orientated environment where young people can feel safe, cared for, and supported. The furnishings and layout have been chosen to reflect a calm and homely atmosphere, helping young people feel a sense of belonging and comfort. Young people were involved in deciding how they wanted their rooms to be decorated and furnished.

- 3.24 All improvements have been completed in line with Care Inspectorate Wales requirements, and the accommodation fully meets the relevant regulatory standards. The works were procured through the council's standard processes and delivered in accordance with the conditions of the Housing with Care Fund (HCF) grant.
- 3.25 Following the completion of the refurbishment works, an open day was held to formally introduce the home to the local community. Direct neighbours were invited to visit the home, take a guided look around the newly refurbished spaces, and meet the full staff team. The event aimed to promote openness, strengthen positive relationships, and foster a sense of neighbourly community living, ensuring that the home is well connected and welcomed within its local area.
- 3.26 A workforce recruitment exercise has been successfully completed. A full time Registered Home Manager, a full time Assistant Manager, nine Residential Childcare Workers, and two Residential Night Childcare Workers were appointed. All newly appointed staff undertook a robust and comprehensive induction programme, supported by a structured training pathway. This included a full suite of mandatory training aligned with both Care Inspectorate Wales and Social Care Wales requirements, ensuring the workforce is fully prepared, compliant, and confident in delivering safe, high quality care.

Registration

- 3.27 The home achieved full registration with Care Inspectorate Wales in July 2025. This confirms that the service meets all regulatory requirements and is authorised to operate as set out within the home's Statement of Purpose. The registration reflects the work undertaken to ensure the environment, staffing arrangements, and governance meet the standards necessary to provide safe, consistent, and high quality residential care for young people.

Matching

- 3.28 A rigorous and robust compatibility and matching process was undertaken to ensure that the young people living together can do so safely, positively, and in a way that supports their individual needs. As a result, four young people are now living at the home, each supported by an individualised care and support plan developed in partnership with their allocated social workers. These plans set out their specific needs, goals, and personal outcomes, and are designed to promote their wellbeing and provide the appropriate safeguards. Since moving into the home all four young people have settled in well and are showing strong signs of stability and positive adjustment.
- 3.29 All four children are consistently attending education and engaging positively with their learning environments. They have also joined a range of local social clubs and activities, helping them build confidence, develop friendships, and establish meaningful routines. Their participation in these opportunities has supported them to integrate well within the local community, fostering a sense of belonging and contributing to the warm, family orientated atmosphere within the home. Overall, the young people are thriving in their new environment, demonstrating progress both

socially and emotionally, and benefiting from a stable, nurturing setting that enables them to grow and achieve their personal goals.

Project Costs

- 3.30 The acquisition costs, including the Land Transaction Fee and all associated expenses, totalled £875,000 and were fully funded through a successful Housing with Care Fund (HCF) capital grant. In addition, the refurbishment works and associated costs, amounting to £529,470, were also met through a further successful HCF capital grant. The expected savings identified in the business case were realised and contributed to the service's savings mandate 25/26.
- 3.31 **Property 2 in Caldicot, a registered residential children's home for 4 children** in partnership with Codi Housing Association, using an existing Codi property. (Business Case Agreed by Cabinet 17th July 2024.)
- 3.32 Since the last update, and following the approval of the feasibility study and the completion of the architectural design plans, a full tender process has been undertaken by Codi. A contractor has now been formally appointed, and construction works commenced at the end of January 26. This marks a significant step forward in moving the project from planning into active delivery. There is a new target completion date set for October 2026.
- 3.33 Codi have also met with the Regional Partnership Board and successfully secured the full grant award required to fund the capital refurbishment costs. In addition, a lease agreement between Codi and MCC has been formally agreed and signed off, with financial provision for the lease included within the approved business case.
- 3.34 A neighbour engagement event, jointly facilitated by Codi and senior managers within children services, has been completed. The session provided local residents with clear information about the intended use of the property and offered an opportunity to ask questions, share views, and build positive relationships. This proactive approach supports transparency, understanding, and community cohesion as the development progresses. Regular updates and newsletters are also being provided to neighbours to ensure ongoing communication and transparency throughout the development process.
- 3.35 The service delivery model will be provided through an in-house staffing team, ensuring stability, consistency, and high-quality care. The team will comprise one full time Home Manager, three Senior Residential Childcare Workers, six Residential Childcare Workers, and two Residential Night Childcare Workers. This structure has been designed to ensure appropriate leadership, robust oversight, and 24-hour care and support for the young people living at the home.
- 3.36 **Property in Abergavenny, 16+ Supported Accommodation for up to 5 care experienced young people** (business case agreed by cabinet in 22nd January 2025).
- 3.37 The business case to acquire a property in Abergavenny, to provide a supported accommodation provision for 5 Monmouthshire care experienced young people aged 16-2, was approved by Cabinet in January 2025. The provision will mirror the supported accommodation scheme in Caldicot, achieving good outcomes for children looked after and those young people preparing to leave care.

Project Costs

- 3.38 The purchase of the property was completed on the 20th March 2025 with total costs of £763,075.

The property was purchased using 100% HCF Grant funding. Since the last update, a revised Housing with Care Fund (HCF) grant application for £707,000 to support the refurbishment works has been submitted to, and approved by, Welsh Government.

3.39 Although there were delays in the tendering process to procure an appointed contractor, this has now been resolved, and a contractor has been successfully appointed. Refurbishment works commenced in March 2026, and a revised completion date of October 2026 has been established to reflect the updated project timeline.

3.40 Following a robust and compliant procurement process, a third party provider has been appointed to deliver the service. Regular meetings are in place between children's services and the provider to establish positive working relationships, ensure effective communication, and maintain strong oversight. Joint planning is actively underway to ensure full readiness for the service becoming operational, with clear structures and processes being aligned in preparation for opening.

3.41 Therapeutic Children's Home, North

This property continues to be leased from Monmouthshire Housing Association in order to provide a rurally located Registered Care Home for up to 2 children with complex (therapeutic) needs. The care and support element is currently through a private provider. Since the last update, the service has successfully gained registration to provide two residential placements, and two young people are now living together at the home.

3.42 Therapeutic Children's Care Home, South

Since the last update the property became available and a minor grants application for the sum of £47,344.50 was submitted to, and approved by, the Regional Partnership Board. This funding has enabled the property to be modernised and reconfigured to create a warm, homely, and nurturing family orientated environment. The refurbishment works have now been completed, and an application has been submitted to Care Inspectorate Wales to register the home as a two bedded bespoke residential provision. The home is currently operational and providing an emergency placement to a young person.

3.43 The service delivery model is being provided by an in-house staffing team comprising one Home Manager, three Senior Residential Childcare Workers, and two Residential Night Childcare Workers. The full team has been appointed and has recently completed a robust induction and training programme, ensuring they are fully prepared, skilled, and confident in delivering high quality residential care.

3.44 Ongoing Property Search

Children Services continue to explore the market for a suitable and appropriate property to develop a further 3 /4 bed, 16+ supported accommodation service. This has proven challenging, not only due to issues of location and affordability, but also because several properties assessed have presented complications relating to Land Registry status, restrictions, and covenants that limit their potential use. Work remains ongoing to identify a viable option that meets the needs of the service and complies with all legal and regulatory requirements.

4.0 WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS IMPLICATIONS (INCORPORATING EQUALITIES, SUSTAINABILITY, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING)

Implementation of the placement development strategy is having a positive impact on children with care experience and young people leaving care. The strategy is providing opportunities to develop

placements that allows for the repatriation or retention of our young people with their communities with huge benefits for their social and cultural identity. Economic benefits include the development of a residential childcare workforce providing quality, well paid jobs for local people. The children will be engaging in the community, accessing groups, entertainment venues and amenities which will further enhance and support the local economy. The development of the properties to an aspirational EPC rating A will not only improve the internal and external fabric of the Council's assets but also reinforce our commitment to reducing our carbon footprint, making our homes sustainable homes for the future.

The projects are being informed by consultation with and involvement of Care Experienced Young People and with community engagement where appropriate. Care experienced young people have been members of the selection panel for the Residential Service Manager post and also in the procurement process for a not for profit supporting living provider.

5.0 OPTION APPRAISAL

N/A

6.0 EVALUATION CRITERIA

6.1 Currently there are 2 main projects under development (one residential home and one supported accommodation provision) with one further supported accommodation provision being searched for. According to our current commissioning needs this would complete the development programme, as it currently stands, subject to on-going review.

6.2 Since the last update, 2 projects having been successfully completed.

6.3 Summary or progress against the placement strategy

Home	Care	Placements	Model	Target Operational Go Live Date
Standard Residential Children's Home (pre-16 years) 12 places originally required (now reduced to 8)				
Monmouth	Residential	4	LA Owned, Care Delivered by LA	Completed July 25 (Slipped by 13 months)
Caldicot Property 2	Residential	4	RSL owned, Care Delivered by LA	New target Oct 2026 (slipped by 10 months)
Standard placement development currently on hold in light of updated commissioning needs				

Therapeutic Children's Homes 6 places originally required (now reduced to 4)				
Existing provision (South)	Therapeutic Residential	Currently 1 Potentially 2	LA Owned – Care delivered by LA (2 placements)	Completed March 2026 – to timescale

Existing provision (North)	Therapeutic Residential	Currently 1 Potentially 2	RSL owned and 3rd sector delivery	Completed – to timescale
Therapeutic placement development now on hold in light of reviewed commissioning needs				

16+ Supported Accommodation originally 20 places required (now reduced to 13/14)				
Caldicot Property 1	16+ supported accommodation	5	LA Owned and 3 rd sector delivery	Completed Nov 24 – to target timescale
Abergavenny	16+ supported accommodation	5	LA Owned and 3 rd sector delivery	New target Oct 2026 (slipped by 10 months)
3/4 more placements potentially required and 3 rd property being searched for				

- 6.4 Project slippage has been a feature of 3 of the major schemes. This has meant that some children’s plans have had to be adjusted and also that service has been delayed in being able to realise the full benefits of the projects. Slippage has been caused through a number of reasons including:- the challenges with partners operating under different governance arrangements; delay in the tendering process and the time it takes to go through tendering; availability of contractors and the timescales set by contractors; unforeseen works / additional works required. The service is now able to set more realistic timescales and has a greater insight into some of the risks and challenges that can beset project completion. Alongside this, the service has developed additional expertise in partnership working externally and internally; project management and planning; submitting applications and reporting against grant funding; supporting and developing a residential workforce; developing successful residential service models to secure good outcomes for children and young people.

7.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Resource implications for the current schemes have been addressed above.

7.2 In terms of funding to support our future objectives we will continue to pursue grant options for the acquisition and refurbishing of any properties. Future business cases will set out the financial arrangements for individual projects with modelling based on either scenario, either with or without grant money, with a proposed mechanism for funding should grant money not be available.

7.3 The development of placements to date has contributed significantly to the ability for Children’s Services to meet required saving mandates, whilst achieving improved outcomes for children and young people. The impact on the service of current project slippage has been factored into budget planning / saving mandates and is informing the ongoing care planning for individual children.

8. REASONS

8.1 This report is being brought into Committee to provide members with assurance that the policy objectives are being pursued and that value for money is being achieved for the Council in terms of property acquisition and use of Council assets.

9.0 CONSULTEES

Children Service Leadership Team

Nick Keyes, Head of Estates

Councillor Ian Chandler, Cabinet Member for Social Care, Safeguarding and Accessible Health Services.

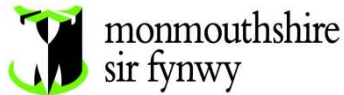
10.0 BACKGROUND Papers

Developing Children's Residential and 16+ Supported Accommodation Placements Report
18th April 2024

Development of Children's Placement Policy (Update) 8th October 2024 and 29th April 2025

11.0 AUTHOR

Scott Hereford -Service Manager Residential and Resource Management
scotthereford@monmouthshire.gov.uk



**SUBJECT: Investment & Commercial Portfolio
Performance Update**

MEETING: Performance & Overview Committee

DATE: April 2026

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All

1. PURPOSE:

For Performance & Overview Committee to receive a performance update on the Council's commercial and investment property portfolio.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the performance of the commercial and investment property portfolio is noted.

3. KEY ISSUES:

Background

- 3.1 This report provides an update on the current performance of the council's commercial and investment property portfolio, including Castlegate Business Park and Newport Leisure Park investments, MCC's County Farms portfolio, and retail and industrial portfolio.
- 3.2 MCC benefits from a diverse land and property portfolio that has delivered a commercial return over a number of years. The portfolio is managed in accordance with the strategic principles and objectives set out in the Council's approved 2023-2027 Asset Management Strategy. The asset register consists of a range of different land and property which have come into MCC ownership over many years through a mixture of acquisition, donation, or council/government reorganisation. These include:
- Acquired investments of Castlegate Business Park and Newport Leisure Park
 - Industrial units
 - Retail units

- Office accommodation
 - County Farms and Bryngwyn Livestock Market
 - Oak Grove Solar Farm
- 3.3 Ongoing management and monitoring of the commercial and investment portfolio is undertaken by officers within MCC's Estates, Finance and Legal departments. Acquired investment assets are supported as part of the wider functions and responsibilities of Landlord Services, and departments are in regular contact with the appointed managing agents for the respective sites. The cost of managing agents is incurred by tenants of the respective properties, recovered via service charge payments.
- 3.4 The combined gross income for all investment and commercial assets, inclusive of acquired investments, for 25-26 was £3.871m.
- 3.5 Since acquisition, both acquired investments have generated a combined net income of £1,836,832. In accordance with the Asset Investment Policy, both assets were acquired as long-term investments capable of generating a financial return and/or strategic economic development impact. It remains the officer recommendation that both assets are retained for these purposes.

Acquired Investment Portfolio

- 3.6 The investments of Castlegate Business Park and Newport Leisure Park were acquired via the Council's Asset Investment Policy. The Asset Investment Policy facilitated acquisition of assets to meet the strategic aim of generating commercial returns, thereby helping to offset wider budget pressures facing the Council. The policy also established the criteria for evaluation of commercial and property investments, measured against the return on investment (ROI) or net income return, over and above the borrowing repayment cost.
- 3.7 At the time of acquisition, prudential borrowing was used to acquire or invest in property, with the cost of borrowing serviced by the resulting rental streams. As a result of the Council's risk appetite and the ongoing strain on its financial standing, any further investment will only be considered in order to support the core policy objectives contained within the Council's latest Community & Corporate Plan and where deemed prudent, sustainable and affordable. The Performance & Overview Scrutiny Committee now receives annual updates on the performance of the Council's property investment portfolio.
- 3.8 Figure 1 shows a summary of financial performance and occupancy rates of the respective portfolios. Further detail on activity associated with each portfolio is outlined in the subsequent section:

	Castlegate Business Park	Newport Leisure Park	
ROI as of March 2024	-3.74%	0.15%	
ROI as of March 2025	-1.81%	1.44%	
ROI as of April 2026	-2.8%	1.80%	
Forecast ROI 26-27	Refer to 3.24	2.40%	
Occupancy rates as of March 2024	85.6%	97%	
Occupancy rates as of March 2025	87.7%	97.1%	
Occupancy rates as of April 2026	85.6%	97.1%	
Net income to MCC 25/26	-£206,550	£294,613	£88,063
Net income to MCC since acquisition	-£367,093	£2,203,925	£1,836,832

- 3.9 Since acquisition, both assets have generated a total income of £1,836,832 above borrowing repayments. Newport Leisure Park is scheduled to exceed the original 2% above borrowing investment criteria in 26/27, but Castlegate Business Park falls significantly below this target. The total annual borrowing costs of £1,471,674 continue to be met in full. As a result, these assets continue to be held as strategic employment, economic development, and income generating assets.
- 3.10 Castlegate Business Park's letting activity has stabilised, with the majority of new lettings achieved via MonSpace initiative or expansion of existing tenants. Recent engagement with multiple letting specialists within the sector has confirmed that the marketing process remains appropriate and quoted rents remain competitive. Castlegate Business Park's performance is most materially affected by business rates corrections, and the surrender of units 520 & 560 / 511 & 515 by an existing tenant who will vacate in July 2026. As outlined in 3.22, negotiations are ongoing with an existing tenant who has fallen into arrears and is seeking to regear their lease to reduce the extent of their occupation. This is likely to further negatively impact the performance of the asset; however proactive and targeted steps continue to be made to deliver an improved ROI.
- 3.11 Newport Leisure Park continues to generate a strong net return to MCC, with the final remaining vacant unit under offer. Newport Leisure Park exceeds 2% ROI and is forecast to approach 3% ROI by 27/28. Continuing to let vacant space will improve the financial performance of both assets, reducing MCC's exposure to business rates, service charge and utilities, and increasing its net return. The 26/27 forecast is reflective of existing lettings and known surrenders (following exercising of break clauses).

Castlegate Business Park

- 3.12 Castlegate Business Park was acquired in September 2018 for £7million together with a service charge loan of £900k and associated acquisition costs. The asset consists of mixed office and production/warehouse space amount to circa 217,000 sqft situated in 18 acres of land adjoining the Caldicot settlement. The property at the time of acquisition was 95% occupied, the majority to Mitel who were the original owners of the site. Following surrender of 60% of the property by Mitel in March 2022, MCC Estates have worked to reduce this void through securing new tenants and expansion of existing businesses.
- 3.13 As of March 2026, the occupancy rates are at 85.6%, a marginal decrease on the 2025 occupancy rate. The plan below illustrates the remaining vacant floor space. Details of lease activity since March 2025 are set out below:



- 3.14 MCC Estates 'MonSpace' initiative, which makes available 9 smaller office suites on more flexible terms than might otherwise be accommodated by the sector, continues to return strong occupancy levels. This has reduced vacant space in the property that may otherwise have been more challenging to let. It has also enabled several local businesses to be retained in the area.

Flexible office space to suit your needs...

CastleGate Business Park





- Free parking
- Onsite cafe
- Excellent transport links
- 15 minutes from the M4

- 3.15 As of March 2026, 7 of the 9 suites remain occupied by a range of businesses including accountancy firms, mortgage advisers, and an integrated structural glass & steel company. One of the two remaining vacant suites is under offer. The letting of MonSpace generates a total rental to MCC of £65,832 pa.
- 3.16 During the reporting period, 9 different businesses have occupied the respective suites spaces within the MonSpace, enabling the property to accommodate a range of business needs including formal meeting space, events and short-term hire. The property has also been used as alternative premises during refurbishment works on a business's primary workspace. The property also accommodated MCC's staff conference day in April 2025.
- 3.17 The 'Tintern Suite' has been let to Squeaky Clean Solutions Ltd, a local business who have been established for a few years operating out of their home address. The Tintern Suite has allowed the business to establish themselves in a commercial setting, allowing for expansion and employment of additional staff.
- 3.18 The 'Caerwent Suite' has been let to Novum Structures UK Ltd, a global structural engineering firm currently previously based in Chepstow but have offices in the USA, Canada, across the UK, Germany, Turkey and China. They specialise in integrated structural glass, steel & ETFE solutions. Novum Structures UK Ltd occupy one of the largest suites within MonSpace.
- 3.19 The onsite café operator (Castell Coffi) continues to trade well, and a lease extension has been secured. The granting of the lease has resulted in a rental uplift to MCC and has secured the offer until at least 2030. The café continues to contribute positively to the catering offer on site and is reducing the service charge liability that historically was associated with the onsite first floor canteen. Consideration is being given for the expansion of the café offer, which would further improve the occupancy of the space.
- 3.20 A small workshop has been let to Subcool Maintenance Ltd, a local air conditioning engineering firm based in Caldicot. They required a base onsite to undertake their daily checks of the cooling systems. The workshop is primarily used for storage.
- 3.21 The Castlegate Business Park car park continues to be hired to facilitate a number of local events, including charity events with Portskewett Football Club and events at Caldicot Castle. The large car park is also being hired by local businesses within the Severn Bridge Industrial Estate for additional parking, further generating a rental for MCC.
- 3.22 Despite additional MonSpace units being let, the overall occupancy rate is scheduled to reduce in 26/27. Notice has been served by an existing tenant (DAQS, a modular building specialist) who will surrender 4 of the 5 units they occupy within the property from July 2026. The surrender equates to 4,125 sq ft and approximately £16,000 of rental consequence to MCC. This will

increase the void rate to 16.3%. No notice has been served to vacate the remaining unit, which remains under legal agreement.

- 3.23 The 2025 Performance Update acknowledged that an existing tenant was in arrears and discussions ongoing regarding payment plans to address short-term cash flow pressures. Whilst the tenant has sought to respond to market conditions through a restructuring of their business and movement to DIY focus, they have been unable to adhere to the repayment schedules. As a consequence, negotiations are well advanced to secure a regearing of their lease that would include reduction of their occupied space. This would enable an important local employer to operate on a more sustainable footprint within the property and secure full repayment of the debt. The consequences of any concession and surrender are anticipated to be concluded ahead of Outturn reporting and will be included as part of that update.
- 3.24 As of March 2026, Castlegate Business Park is projected to generate a commercial loss of £206,550. This is primarily as a consequence of business rates corrections relating to the original surrender of space of Mitel in 2022. With the exception of the lease surrender referenced in 3.22, no other break clauses have been exercised. The next available break option is January 2027, with negotiations ongoing to secure a long-term lease renewal. Figure 2 below forecasts the ROI implications of additional space being let or vacated:

Letting	Occupancy %	ROI	Net Income
9,571 sq ft	90%	-1.2%	£-92,992
20,351 sq ft	95%	-0.5%	£-34,912
31,130 sq ft	100%	2.2%	£162,804
Surrender			
11,989 sq ft	80%	-4.9%	-£348,798
22,769 sq ft	75%	-6.6%	-£476,702
33,337 sq ft	70%	-8.4%	-£602,090

- 3.25 The consequence of any negotiated surrender, as per 3.23, is reflected in Figure 2 and proactive steps are being taken to ensure vacated space is re-let at the earliest opportunity. The above projections also presume no rental increase associated with existing tenants. Rent reviews are underway with a number of existing occupiers, and efforts are being made to identify further efficiencies associated with the service charge regime (thereby enabling further savings). This would improve the ROI projections detailed within the table.
- 3.26 Castlegate Business Park has been selected as one of Cardiff Capital Region's three pilot projects for 'Helping Business Lower the Load'. The project includes a 2-phase scheme – phase 1 being an energy audit profiling data to determine feasibility of smart local energy systems, and phase 2 being development of a digital twin to explore intervention scenarios and investment.

Such interventions will enable MCC to further reduce operating costs, thereby improving the attractiveness of the offering and reducing MCC's holding costs.

- 3.27 In the absence of a significant new letting during the reporting period, Castlegate BP remains on a difficult but significantly improved trajectory following the various lettings and expansion of tenants since the loss of Mitel as anchor tenant in 2022. At acquisition, 13 businesses occupied 95% of the property. As of April 2026, 16 businesses occupy 85.6% with over 300 staff employed from the premises. Efforts continue to be made to work closely with existing tenants to secure the expansion and development of established businesses, whilst also providing incubator spaces for the growth of new ventures. Our marketing strategy remains one focused on opportunities to diversify and attract sectoral partners (e.g. complimentary businesses within the semi-conductor and MedTech sectors) and constructive recent dialogue with Cardiff Capital Region has contributed to a number of promising recent enquiries. Castlegate BP also featured within CCR's Investment Prospectus for 2026 – included due to the strategic opportunity it presents.

Newport Leisure Park

- 3.28 Newport Leisure Park was acquired in March 2019 at a cost of £22.5million. It is situated on the Newport/Monmouthshire border and comprises of a mix of six restaurants, two retail units and three leisure units within an 11-acre site. At the time of acquisition, all of the units were let on the basis of long leaseholds with no rental or service charge arrears.
- 3.29 Since acquisition, the park was subject to significant closures as a consequence of the Covid pandemic and we have experienced turnover in tenants. Despite the turnover, the asset is currently generating a net return to MCC of 1.80%. There is one remaining vacant unit at the property, with the rest of the property operating consistently and in accordance with our forecasts.
- 3.30 Details of letting and management activity since March 2025 are set out below:
- 3.31 In January 2024, MCC elected to exercise forfeiture on the lease of Unit 9B Tiffins. This followed an extended period of rental arrears and inability of the tenant to address the debt. This unit is the only vacant unit at the Leisure Park and is under offer for a new occupier. Head of Terms have been exchanged for the new occupier, with the proposed letting being subject to change of use planning consent (change to retail). Should planning consent be granted, a long-term lease is to be entered that will generate a rental value aligned to the returns achieved at acquisition of NLP.
- 3.32 Grid capacity has been secured for the development of 10 new Electric Vehicle charging bays at the site. Contracts have been exchanged and planning application submitted. Once installed and subject to completion of a rent-free period at launch, the EV chargers would generate in excess of £35,000 of rental benefit to MCC.

- 3.33 The 2025 Performance Update noted the proposed letting of Unit 6, previously occupied by Pizza Hut, to Horizon Vets Ltd. The veterinarians completed their fit out of the unit and have been trading since late 2025. The letting has generated a competitive rental return to MCC, and we understand that their trading position has been strong and exceeds the original projections.
- 3.34 Two existing tenants are subject to rent reviews in early 26/27. A £25,000 pa fixed increase in rental will take effect from April 2026. Another tenant is subject to a rent review which is shortly to be negotiated. The fixed increase in rental is reflected in the 26/27 forecast.
- 3.35 Unit 1, let to Cineworld, continues to be subject to the outcome of the national restructure of the Cineworld Group. As previously reported, the rent payable has been adjusted since December 2024 and will remain on a reduced value until December 2027 (at which point it will be revalued). McDonalds and Cineworld have recently approached MCC for a cross-promotional event at select cinemas within the UK. NLP has been selected as one of the sites due to high footfall within the leisure park and wider estate.
- 3.36 MCC are in negotiation with an advertising board company (Route Media) who have applied for planning permission. Planning permission has been refused; however, we understand the applicant is appealing with decision. Should the decision be overturned on appeal, this will further enhance the rental income from the asset.
- 3.37 There are no tenants in arrears at Newport Leisure Park. There are no leases scheduled to expire in the forthcoming financial year and no break options that can be exercised within the next 18 months. The asset remains stable and generating a commercial return to MCC.

Commercial and Other Investment Portfolio's

- 3.38 The Council's industrial portfolio comprises of 40 units ranging in size from 365ft² to 2,850ft² located within Caldicot and Raglan. They continue to be in high demand. Currently the portfolio is 97.5% let and there are rental arrears in the region of £16k, a £16k reduction on arrears in 2025 and £4k of which is within a month of the due date. This equates to less than 8.7% of the rent roll. Unit 5, Pill Farm Industrial Estate Caldicot has been let to a new occupier on a 5-year lease. Unit 8D, Old Pill Farm Industrial Estate has also been re-let to a new occupier (Hot Tub Revive Ltd) on a 5-year lease. 5G Castleway Industrial Estate is the final vacant unit and is shortly to be tendered.
- 3.39 The retail portfolio is made up of 23 secondary neighbourhood units, which are a combination of freehold and long leasehold tenures. Whilst there has been some movement in occupation following surrender of retail premises in Chepstow, the portfolio overall remains very well occupied. The refurbishment of the former One Stop Shop at Monmouth Market Hall using grant funding secured by the Regeneration Team has been completed. A new 3-year lease

has been agreed for this unit, subject to a Change of Use Application for a Bridal Dress Shop being approved. A Change of Use application has been approved for the former planning offices at Market Hall for the use of a gallery, workshop and event space. A new 5-year lease for the premises is progressing through legal. The new leases will generate a rental income for MCC and offset ongoing revenue costs for the respective properties. A new tenant has also been secured for Thornwell Pavilion, with a lease to be entered shortly generating a competitive rental value. Rental arrears across the retail portfolio represent less than 2% of the rent roll.

- 3.40 The ground floor of Innovation House, Magor continues to be occupied on the ground floor by MCC's Social Care Workforce Development Team, alongside a commercial operator on the second-floor smaller wing generating a rental return. The remaining vacant space continues to be marketed. CNG Fuels, who develop, own and operate sustainable refuelling infrastructure for HGVs, are hiring the overflow car parking area at Wales1 Business Park as a site compound. This occupation is to facilitate construction project on the land adjacent to the business park. The licence fee is generating in excess of £13,000 to MCC.
- 3.41 There are 24 farm holdings in the Council's ownership generating an improving commercial return. There are £45k of arrears for County farms, £35 of which relates to an individual farm holding and where debt recovery action is ongoing. This represents 16% of the rent roll. Two agricultural cottages have recently been declared surplus and are shortly to be marketed for disposal. 2 further vacant cottages are in the process of being refurbished and will be marketed to let. A 10-year farm business tenancy (FBT) extension has been agreed at Lower House Farm. 2 new FBTs have been agreed in the succession case at 4 Llandewi Court Farm. MCC also continue to receive rental payments from the Bryngwyn Livestock Market, which makes rental payments based on a combination of turnover and base rent.
- 3.42 Income from the Council's solar farm is currently forecasting to generate a net income of £473,862 at month 9, £128,507 more than the budgeted surplus of £345,355. This is mainly due to improvements in efficiency following maintenance works, higher ROC values, and better than average weather conditions resulting in increased income. Latest monitoring indicates minimal change to the forecast through to year end. Since 2017, the solar farm has generated a gross income for MCC of £6,026,592

OPTIONS APPRAISAL:

The report is not a decision-making report. The report represents a performance review of the commercial and investment portfolios, as required under the governance changes outlined in the Asset Management Strategy. Therefore, no option appraisal is required.

1. REASONS:

The Asset Management Strategy requires a 6-month performance review of the Council's commercial and investment portfolios.

2. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

The 25/26 projections have been adjusted to reflect the changes and risk associated with surrenders and business rates corrections at Castlegate Business Park. Despite these changes, the investment portfolio is forecast to generate a £88,063 net income due to Newport Leisure Park projected significant return and a net surplus, after borrowing repayments.

£30.7m of the approved £50m asset investment programme has been spent on the two acquired investments at Castlegate and NLP. £1,852,738 of the remaining fund has been retained within the capital budget to apply to any future maintenance and development work required across the sites, with the remaining balance now expired and removed from the budget.

	Castlegate			NLP			Combined		
	Budget	Forecast	Variance	Budget	Forecast	Variance	Budget	Forecast	Variance
Expenditure	796,980	998,736	201,756	1,037,287	1,022,089	-15,198	1,834,267	2,020,825	186,558
Income	-682,400	-792,186	-109,786	-1,359,825	-1,316,702	43,123	-2,042,225	-2,108,888	-66,663
Net Return	114,580	206,550	91,970	-322,538	-294,613	27,925	-207,958	-88,063	119,895

As a result of the investments, budgeted income targets have been introduced. The latest forecast at period 3 of 2025/26 shows a net surplus generated on NLP of £294,613 and a deficit of £206,550 on Castlegate, a combined surplus on both investments of £88,063. This results in an in-year forecast budget pressure of £119,895.

As a strategic asset within the county, information has been sought on the number of jobs created at Castlegate Business Park since the last performance update. Castlegate Business Park continues to be a significant employer with 313 staff employed at the site.

The capital values of both assets continue to be impacted by the respective sectors, and the impact on rent roll will continue to impact the capital appreciation/depreciation. Both assets will be revalued in accordance with MCC's programme of annual asset valuations, with anticipated improvements in the capital value of Newport Leisure Park and minor changes in Castlegate Business Park. Outturn reporting will provide a more detailed update on the asset valuation of both assets.

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

There are no equality and Future Generations implications arising from the purpose of this report. This report provides a performance review of the commercial and investment portfolios.

4. CONSULTEES:

Stacey Jones – Finance and Resources Manager

5. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Appendix 1 – Performance Dashboard

6. AUTHOR(S):

Nicholas Keyse – Acting Head of Landlord Services

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Appendix 1 – Performance Dashboard

Performance Indicators		
Measures/Milestones	25/26 Target	March 2026
Total Gross income target for investment and commercial portfolio	£3,768,672	£3,969,839
Industrial Unit Gross Income	£223,275	£181,987
County Farm Gross Income	£284,120	£275,832
Solar Farm Gross Income	£677,032	£844,695
Retail and Office Gross Income	£542,110	£570,840
% of rental arrears from commercial portfolio total income	2%	3.8%
Castlegate Business Park Occupancy Rates	100%	85.6%
Newport Leisure Park Occupancy Rates	100%	97.1%
Castlegate Business Park – Job creation from lettings or existing tenants	n/a	313 employed

Committee / Decision Maker	Meeting date / Decision due	Report Title	Cabinet member	Purpose	Author	Date item added to the planner
Cabinet	Deferred	Pavement Café Policy	Paul Griffiths - Sustainable Economy	To adopt the pavement café policy as the basis for making decisions on applications for licences	Carl Touhig	4-Oct-22
Council	04-Mar-27	Adoption of Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP)2018-2033	Paul Griffiths - Sustainable Economy	To consider adoption of RLDP following the public examination by PEDW	Craig O Connor	19-Feb-26
Cabinet	09-Dec-26	Caldicot Placemaking Plan	Paul Griffiths - Sustainable Economy	To consider adoption of the Caldicot Place making Plan	Craig O Connor	19-Feb-26
Cabinet	09-Dec-26	Strategic Risk Assessment	Ben Callard - Resources	To provide Cabinet with an overview of the current strategic risks facing the authority.	Hannah Carter	19-Feb-26
Cabinet	09-Dec-26	Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) Annual letter	Angela Sandles - Engagement	To fulfil the expectation of the PSOW that their report is brought to the attention of Cabinet.	Annette Evans	2-Mar-26
Council	12-Nov-26	Annual Director's Report for Social Care	Ian Chandler - Social Care & Safeguarding	Present the annual report to Council	Jane Rodgers	3-Mar-26
Council	12-Nov-26	Safeguarding Annual Evaluation Report	Ian Chandler - Social Care & Safeguarding	Present the annual evaluation of safeguarding across Council services	Jane Rodgers	3-Mar-26
Council	24-Sep-26	Self-Assessment Report 2025/26	Mary Ann Brocklesby - Whole Authority Strategy	To seek Council approval of the self-assessment report 2025/26 to ensure that members have a clear and transparent assessment of the authority's performance during the year ending 31 March 2026 in line with requirements outlined in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.	Hannah Carter	10-Feb-26
Cabinet	08-Jul-26	Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023: Monmouthshire County Council's Annual Report	Ben Callard - Resources	To seek approval of the Social Partnership Duty Report 2026, setting out how the authority will build on existing practice and work collaboratively with trade unions to ensure compliance with the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023.	Philippa Green	9-Feb-26
Council	25-Jun-26	Panel Performance Assessment	Mary Ann Brocklesby - Whole Authority Strategy	To receive the Panel Performance Assessment report and the authority's response to the recommendations.	Matt Gatehouse	17-Mar-26
Cabinet	10-Jun-26	Investment Package for Caldicot Leisure Centre	Angela Sandles - Engagement	Consideration of proposed investment to improve facilities at Caldicot Leisure Centre	Craig O Connor	19-Feb-26
Cabinet	20-May-26	S106 Affordbale Housing Contributions	Sara Burch	To recommend options to commit and spend some of the contributions	Louise Corbett	27-Mar-26
ICMD	20-May-26	REVOKING THE USK AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT AREA ORDER 2005	Angela Sandles - Engagement	To request the Cabinet Member (Cllr Angela Sandles) to agree to the revocation of the Usk Air Quality Management Area Order 2005.	Huw Owen	9-Apr-26
Cabinet	10-Jun-26	Strategic Risk Assessment	Ben Callard - Resources	To provide Cabinet with an overview of the current strategic risks facing the authority.	Hannah Carter	19-Feb-26
Cabinet	15-Apr-26	Consultation concerning the provision of Early Education at Durand Primary School	Laura Wright - Education	To provide Members with feedback following the statutory consultation process concerning proposals to replace the Local Authority Nursery with a non maintained setting at Durand Primary School	Matthew Jones	4-Mar-26
ICMD	08-Apr-26	Goldwire Lane ICMD - Prohibition of Driving Except for Access, Goldwire Lane, Monmouth	Catrin Maby - Climate Change and Environment	To seek Cabinet Member approval to proceed to make permanent the MCC Goldwire Lane prohibition of driving (except for access) traffic order	Graham Kinsella	26-Mar-26

Cabinet	30-Mar-26	Proposed acquisition of land to construct a road diversion at Llanthony Valley	Catrin Maby - Climate Change and Environment	To seek Cabinet approval to the acquisition of land to enable the Highway Authority to construct a road realignment away from the land slip at Llanthony Valley.	Deb Hill Howells	19-Feb-26
Cabinet	04-Mar-26	Monmouthshire Draft Local Growth Fund Investment Plan	Paul Griffiths - Sustainable Economy	To present to elected members UK Government's new Local Growth Fund and Monmouthshire Draft Fund Investment Plan.	Hannah Jones	12-Feb-26
ICMD	25-Feb-26	Submission of Section 6 Biodiversity duty report to WG	Catrin Maby - Climate Change and Environment	To submit report outlining how the Council maintains and enhances biodiversity and promote the resilience of ecosystems	Craig O Connor	7-Jan-26
Cabinet	11-Feb-26	26/27 Placemaking Delivery	Paul Griffiths - Sustainable Economy	To agree funding allocations for Welsh Government Transforming Towns and Pride in Place. Impact Fund.	Craig O Connor	19-Dec-25
ICMD	17-Dec-25	Annual Performance Report - Planning	Paul Griffiths - Sustainable Economy	Report the Annual Performance Report to Welsh Government	Andrew Jones	15-Oct-25
ICMD	17-Dec-25	Section 6 Report to Welsh Government on Biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems	Catrin Maby - Climate Change and Environment	Report of Councils actions taken to help maintain and enhance biodiversity	Kate Stinchcombe/Colette Bosley	15-Oct-25
ICMD	17-Dec-25	Various Traffic Regulation Orders - Amendment Order No 18	Catrin Maby - Climate Change and Environment	The report seeks Cabinet Member approval to proceed with the making and implementation of the MCC Traffic Regulation, speed limit and parking regulations Consolidation Order 2019 (Amendment Order No.18) 2025	Gareth Freeman	26-Nov-25
Cabinet	10-Dec-25	Approval of Placemaking Plans - Monmouth, Abergavenny, Magor and Undy	Paul Griffiths - Sustainable Economy	Approval of Placemaking Plans - Monmouth, Abergavenny, Magor and Undy	Craig O Connor	17-Nov-25
Cabinet	19-Nov-25	Car Parking Review	Paul Griffiths - Sustainable Economy	That Cabinet endorses the following recommendations 1.That Cabinet agrees the strategic objectives for the Council's parking strategy 2.That Cabinet agrees the proposed MCC actions in response to the recommendations made in the Monmouthshire car parking review	Craig O Connor	9-Oct-25
Council	23-Oct-25	RLDP for Adoption	Paul Griffiths - Sustainable Economy		Rachel Lewis	17-Apr-25
Cabinet	15-Oct-25	Connect to Work and Future Focus programmes	Paul Griffiths - Sustainable Economy		Hannah Jones / Rory Clifford	21-Jul-25
Cabinet	17-Sep-25	Proposed endorsement of the Monmouthshire Local Area Energy Plan	Catrin Maby - Climate Change and Environment	Welsh Government commissioned the production of Local Area Energy Plans for Local Authority areas which will be used to develop a regional and national Energy Plan. The Local Area Energy Plan for Monmouthshire provides data on the energy requirements of the county and the transition that will be required to support carbon neutrality of the energy demands. The report seeks Cabinets endorsement of the Local Area Energy Plan to enable the development of the regional Area Energy Plan and a supporting Investment Prospectus.	Deb Hill Howells	28-Jul-25
ICMD	20-Aug-25	Highway Traffic Regulation Amendment Order No 17	Catrin Maby - Climate Change and Environment		Gareth Freeman	4-Aug-25
Cabinet	25-Jun-25	Nature Recovery Action Plan & Green Infrastructure Strategy	Catrin Maby - Climate Change and Environment		Collette Bosley	17-Apr-25
Cabinet	21-May-25	Y Prentis Update	Paul Griffiths - Sustainable Economy		Hannah Jones	26-Feb-25

Cabinet	21-May-25	Placemaking Grant 25/26 & 26/27	Paul Griffiths - Sustainable Economy		Craig O Connor	29-Apr-25
ICMD	09-Apr-25	PSPO Lane Closure to prevent fly tipping & off roading	Catrin Maby - Climate Change and Environment		Mark Cleaver	13-Mar-25
ICMD	12-Mar-25	Highway Traffic Regulation Amendment Order No 16	Catrin Maby - Climate Change and Environment			
Council	06-Mar-25	Appointment of Chief Officer - Head of Transport - Exempt info	Catrin Maby - Climate Change and Environment		Deb Hill Howells	21-Jan-25
Cabinet	19-Feb-25	UK Shared Prosperity Fund post March 2025 – financial implications and impact	Paul Griffiths - Sustainable Economy		Hannah Jones	10-Jul-24

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Monmouthshire's Scrutiny Forward Work Programme 2025-26

Meeting Date	Subject	Purpose of Scrutiny	Responsibility	Type of Scrutiny
21 st April 2026	Development of Children's Placements – 12mth update	To update the committee following scrutiny in April 25.	Jane Rodgers Scott Hereford Diane Corrister Cllr Chandler	Performance Reporting
	Investment and Commercial Interests Update – 12mth update	To update the committee following scrutiny in April 25.	Nick Keyse Peter Davies Cllr Callard	Performance Reporting
4th June 2026 – INVITATION TO G&A COMMITTEE	Panel Performance Assessment	To receive the Panel Performance Assessment report and the authority's response to the recommendations.	Cllr Brocklesby Matt Gatehouse	Performance Reporting
9 th June 2026 (provisional)	Update on the Pupil Referral Service (PRS)	Discussion on significant changes that have occurred in the service and the risks around increasing demand.	Morwenna Wagstaff Jackie Elias Hayley Page Cllr Wright	Performance Reporting
	Specialist Resource Bases & Additional Learning Provision (including progress with ALN implementation)	To review progress at 12-month stage and include reviewing progress with ALN following the implementation of new legislation.	Morwenna Wagstaff Jackie Elias Hayley Page Cllr Wright	Performance Reporting
	Supporting Vulnerable Learners	To follow up from June 25 – annual.	Morwenna Wagstaff Lucie Doyle Cllr Wright	Performance Reporting
21 st July 2026 (provisional)	NEET Reduction Strategy	To scrutinise the strategy's performance. [1 page summary – see minutes]	Hannah Jones Louise Wilce Cllr Griffiths	Performance Monitoring

Monmouthshire's Scrutiny Forward Work Programme 2025-26

Monmouthshire's Scrutiny Forward Work Programme 2025-26				
Meeting Date	Subject	Purpose of Scrutiny	Responsibility	Type of Scrutiny
	Infrastructure Project Management	To scrutinise project management arrangements in Infrastructure.	Nick Tulp Deb Hill-Howells	Performance Reporting
	Self-Assessment 25/26 (Additional Business?)	To scrutinise the self-assessment and identify any areas for further scrutiny.	Hannah Carter Richard Jones Matt Gatehouse Cllr Brocklesby	Performance Reporting
29th September 2026 (provisional)	Safeguarding Annual Evaluation Report	To scrutinise the performance of safeguarding arrangements.	Jane Rodgers Cllr Chandler	Performance Reporting
	Annual Director's Report for Social Care	To scrutinise the progress and strategic direction for the service area.	Jane Rodgers Cllr Chandler	Performance Reporting
	For Purpose On Purpose (F-Pop)	To update the committee about F-Pop and its implications for the reorganisation of Project Management.	Paul Matthews Carly Rogers	Performance Reporting
24th November 2026 (provisional)	Strategic Risk Assessment (Additional Business?)	To scrutinise the overview of the current strategic risks facing the authority and suggest any further topics for scrutiny.	Hannah Carter Richard Jones Cllr Callard	Performance Reporting
19th January 2027 (provisional)	Economy, Employment and Skills Strategy action plan update?^			
Future Items – dates to be confirmed				

Monmouthshire's Scrutiny Forward Work Programme 2025-26

Meeting Date	Subject	Purpose of Scrutiny	Responsibility	Type of Scrutiny
To be confirmed	Grants item – with People members?*	To scrutinise the Council's use of grant money, to assure that it is fit for purpose.	Jonathan Davies	Performance Monitoring
To be confirmed	Consultants and Agencies – with People members?*	To scrutinise the Council's use of consultants and agency workers – the number, relative value, reasons, etc.	Jonathan Davies Peter Davies?	Performance Monitoring
To be confirmed – best end of 2025?	Shared Prosperity Funding 2023-25+	Shared Prosperity Funding measures 2023-2025, update on the measures for transition year 25/26 and future funding risk.	Hannah Jones Will McLean	Performance Reporting
To be confirmed	<i>Curriculum Impact</i>	<i>To scrutinise the impact of the new curriculum on learners and results.</i>	<i>Will McLean Sharon Randall-Smith Ed Pryce Cllr Wright</i>	<i>Performance Reporting</i>
To be confirmed (Dec/Jan – 19 th Jan 27?^)	<i>Economy, Employment and Skills Strategy action plan update</i>	<i>To update the committee on the Economy, Employment and Skills Strategy action plan.</i>	<i>Hannah Jones James Woodcock Will McLean</i>	<i>Performance Reporting</i>
To be confirmed	<i>Recruitment and retention</i>	<i>Effect on the Council's performance and ability to deliver.</i>		
To be confirmed	<i>Use of Reserves</i>	<i>Future proofing and resilience planning as well as supporting long-term strategic priorities.</i>	<i>Peter Davies Jonathan Davies Cllr Callard</i>	

Monmouthshire's Scrutiny Forward Work Programme 2025-26

Monmouthshire's Scrutiny Forward Work Programme 2025-26				
Meeting Date	Subject	Purpose of Scrutiny	Responsibility	Type of Scrutiny
To be confirmed Spring 2027 (23rd March?)	Development of Children's Placements – 12mth update	<i>To update the committee following scrutiny in April 26.</i>	<i>Jane Rodgers Scott Hereford Diane Corrister Cllr Chandler</i>	<i>Performance Reporting</i>
Social Justice Strategy progress				
Business Monmouthshire Project monitoring				
'Learning led' review of educational provision in Chepstow				
Review of Property Assets				

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- **Exclusions** ~ Annual Reporting ~ January/February
- **Additional Learning Provision & Specialist Resource Base development** ~ Annual Reporting ~ June
- **Support for Vulnerable Learners** ~ Annual Reporting ~ June

Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee

Action List

10th March 2026

Minute Item:	Subject	Officer / Member	Outcome
4	To establish a Task And Finish Group to improve shared understanding of complex issues (particularly deficits), and enable members to contribute to practical, informed recommendations to the Directorate	Scrutiny Team, Members, Will McLean, Cabinet Members	In process.
4	To provide a report to the committee ahead of the Strategic Director's report to council, setting out plans to address Estyn's recommendations, 'however' statements, and focus on 'what we are doing'	Will McLean	
4	To check that the dates of strike action at King Henry VIII will not clash with scheduled exams	Will McLean, Ed Pryce	Checked and reported back to members.
5	To bring a future report to the committee on Key Stage 5 results	Will McLean, Ed Pryce	
7	That members be invited to the meeting of Governance & Audit committee at which the Panel Performance Assessment of the Council is tabled	Scrutiny team, Democratic Services	Requested.
7	To include the Social Partnership and Public Procurement Act as a future scrutiny item, subject to space on an agenda.	Scrutiny team, Philippa Green	Report to be sent to members 15 th June for responses back by 22 nd June 12pm
7	To programme an item on scrutiny of the new Welsh curriculum	Scrutiny Team, Will McLean	

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Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr USK on Tuesday, 10th March, 2026 at 10.00 am

Councillors Present

County Councillor Alistair Neill, (Chair)
County Councillor Rachel Buckler, (Vice Chair)

County Councillors: Jill Bond, John Crook,
Steven Garratt, Meirion Howells, M. Newell,
Paul Pavia and Peter Strong

Clare Werrett

Also in attendance: County Councillor
Laura Wright, Cabinet Member for Education

Officers in Attendance

Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer
Will McLean, Chief Officer for Children and Young
People
Ed Pryce, Assistant Director, LA School
Improvement Service
Sharon Randall-Smith, Head of Achievement and
Attainment
Morwenna Wagstaff, Head of Service , Inclusion
Nikki Wellington, Finance and Support Services
Manager

APOLOGIES: None.

1. Declarations of Interest

None.

2. Public Open Forum

None.

3. Estyn Report - To scrutinise the findings of the latest Estyn report.

Chief Officer Will McLean introduced the report with Cabinet Member Laura Wright and answered the members' questions:

How can elected members better understand and respond to school deficits when they are regularly questioned by residents?

Day-to-day management of school deficits sits with headteachers and governing bodies, but we recognise that members need clearer information in order to respond confidently to public concerns and to consider county-level policy implications. Enhanced reporting on causes of deficits and the effectiveness of interventions would help members fulfil this role and support more informed scrutiny.

Why is the proportion of pupils identified with Additional Learning Needs higher than the Welsh average, and is this a cause for concern? Is there a risk that pupils are being over-diagnosed with ALN?

The figure relates specifically to pupils with an Individual Development Plan, which is a tightly defined legal category. Other pupils may experience barriers to learning without meeting this threshold. Being around 2% above the Welsh average is not unusual and likely reflects a combination of factors, including strong parental advocacy. We are confident that assessments are accurate and that pupils are neither under nor over identified, with assurance provided through the work of the Inclusion team.

What is the current position regarding industrial action and financial recovery at King Henry VIII School?

There has already been one day of industrial action, with further days planned. While the council is working to prevent further action, the planned strike days are expected to proceed. Work has been

undertaken to provide assurance around compulsory redundancies, and staffing is being adjusted to better match pupil numbers. A recovery period has been agreed that is shorter than that referenced in the Estyn report but still extends over a significant timeframe. The approach aims to support recovery through pupil number growth rather than rapid staffing reductions, with the objective of restoring financial stability without putting pupils' education at risk, while continuing dialogue with unions and school leadership.

Why do reports to elected members not clearly explain the reasons for individual school overspends or the impact of council intervention, and can this be improved for future scrutiny?

Future reports can include clearer information on trends in individual school deficits or surpluses, whether recovery plans are on track, and the specific risks faced by schools. The main drivers of overspends are well understood and typically relate to staffing costs, supply cover, and decisions around provision for pupils with Additional Learning Needs. We recognise the need to demonstrate more clearly the impact of intervention, while balancing transparency with the need to avoid placing sensitive information about individual schools into the public domain. More detailed reporting is most feasible at year end.

How significant is the overall growth in the schools deficit, and is this an isolated or system-wide issue?

The overall schools deficit has increased rapidly over the year, rising from around £4 million to approximately £7.5-£7.6 million in the latest forecast. This is not confined to a single school but reflects system-wide financial pressures across the school estate.

Can clearer, written information be provided setting out what is already being done to address the issues identified in the inspection? Can members be given clearer sight of the plans in place to address areas for improvement, including evaluation quality and deficits?

Variation in evaluative quality stems from differences in how clearly services define intended outcomes at the outset. Officers are actively working on this by developing a directorate-wide plan for 2026-27 that will sit between individual service improvement plans and the Community & Corporate Plan. This plan is intended to clarify priorities and expectations and make improvement activity more explicit and coherent. An improved evaluative approach and clearer articulation of priorities will be visible through the Strategic Director's annual report to Council, expected in June. This report will include both a retrospective assessment of performance and a forward-looking, outcome-focused plan, addressing the request for clearer articulation of "what we are doing".

How can scrutiny be involved in following improvement work through to completion, rather than only seeing snapshot reports? Is there a way for scrutiny to help track progress over time and support closing the remaining gaps identified in the report?

The new directorate-wide plan is designed to support more precise evaluation of impact, enabling clearer assessment of whether outcomes were achieved, exceeded, or missed – and why. This structure is intended to make improvement activity easier to track over time.

The committee has discussed establishing a Task And Finish group of committee members working with officers to improve the shared understanding of complex issues (particularly deficits), and enable members to contribute to practical, informed recommendations to the directorate

We welcome working with the committee on this. A focused group could be particularly useful in areas such as school deficits, helping members understand what drives expenditure, how different parts of the system interact, and what realistic levers for change exist. – **ACTION: to establish a Task And Finish Group to improve shared understanding of complex issues (particularly deficits), and enable members to contribute to practical, informed recommendations to the directorate**

Would it be useful for the directorate to report back to Performance & Overview Scrutiny before the Strategic Director's report goes to Council, or would this work be taken forward primarily through the Task And Finish group?

A combination of both approaches would be appropriate: a report back to the committee setting out plans to address Estyn's recommendations and "however" statements and separate, more detailed work through a Task And Finish group. The Task And Finish group would need clear outputs and outcomes, which should be agreed after the meeting. – **ACTION**

How is impact measured? How is Estyn's concern about under-evaluation being addressed?

The local authority is several layers removed from direct classroom activity and therefore does not control the day-to-day teaching and learning experienced by pupils. The authority's role is to create the strategic conditions that enable improvement, rather than delivering outcomes directly. Evaluation of the authority's contribution is therefore framed around how services are commissioned, how partners such as school improvement services are held to account, and the assurance gained from those relationships about standards and progress in schools. The need to be clear about where the authority intervenes, what impact is expected from those interventions, and how success can then be evaluated, is acknowledged.

When will a clear, outcome-focused performance framework be in place, and what will it include?

In relation to the performance framework, the officer referred to a broad evaluative and quality-assurance approach that relies on commissioning arrangements, partnership working and oversight of external providers. Performance was described as being understood through the education system as a whole, rather than through a single authority-controlled framework. While this provided context about how assurance is currently gained, there was no confirmation that a clear, outcome-focused performance framework either exists or is in development. No timescales were given, and there was no explanation of how key areas such as attainment trends, exclusions, ALN outcomes, progress measures or intervention impact would be consistently captured, reported and scrutinised.

What is the targeted plan to improve secondary attendance, especially for disadvantaged learners?

Further work is needed on secondary school attendance, as it remains too low, particularly for pupils eligible for free school meals. Schools are responsible for day-to-day engagement and encouragement, while the authority operates at the sharp end of the system, providing statutory oversight and, where necessary, enforcement. The authority provides wrap-around support for families, helping to identify and address barriers to attendance. We place strong emphasis on partnership working between schools, education welfare, school improvement partners and educational psychologists.

What measures are being put in place to support more learners transitioning into Welsh-medium secondary school?

Support for Welsh-medium progression is rooted in the authority's Welsh Education Strategic Plan (WESP), which has been formally agreed by Council and is described as a cornerstone of policy and strategic direction. Practical measures highlighted focused primarily on strengthening Welsh-medium provision at primary level in order to create a stronger pipeline into secondary education. This includes the development of four Welsh-medium Key Stage 2 cohorts, the establishment of Welsh-medium provision in Caldicot, the seedling school in Monmouth, and the planned expansion of Ysgol Y Fenni to a two-form entry school from September.

What are the targets and timescales to increase the number of fluent Welsh learners that can realistically be achieved?

There are forthcoming national expectations, including new legislation that will require 10% of education to be delivered through the medium of Welsh by 2030, and to the authority's contribution to the Welsh Government ambition of one million Welsh speakers by 2050. There are particular linguistic challenges facing Monmouthshire as a border authority; progress is being made but within structural constraints. Future strategic director reports could more explicitly track progress against WESP ambitions.

How will the extra budget funding for Welsh learning be spent?

Welsh language development has been identified as a first-year priority, with investment in whole-authority professional learning and involvement from regional partners to assess impact through dip-sampling. Further information on progress against the WESP will be brought back to scrutiny and/or Council.

Will the planned strike action at King Henry VIII school affect learners sitting exams? – **ACTION: to check that the date of exams will not clash with strike action**

Chair's Summary:

The Chair confirmed that the report and recommendations were agreed, noting that while scrutiny had rightly focused on the more challenging issues, there was also a great deal of strong and positive work in the report that should be acknowledged and fed back to the wider team. The Chair also confirmed that the committee would proceed with establishing a Task and Finish Group, with the detailed scope and timeframe to be picked up outside the meeting.

4. School Examination Results - To receive a report on the latest school examination results (Key Stage 4).

Ed Pryce delivered a presentation, introduced the report and answered the members' questions with Will McLean:

What do the current family rankings mean, and are these positions acceptable?

The figures do not describe absolute school performance, but show each school's position within its comparator family, which groups schools by contextual factors such as disadvantage. For example, a ranking of 6 out of 10 indicates that a school sits broadly in the middle of its family, rather than underperforming. Chepstow and Monmouth sit within some of the least disadvantaged families in Wales, which is important context when interpreting these positions.

What explains recent improvements in some schools, and what learning can be shared?

Analysis of improvement happens through the annual school improvement cycle, led by the local authority and school improvement partners from September onwards. Schools are expected to interrogate their own data and explain the "why" behind changes in performance to governing bodies. Factors such as staffing changes or long-term absence within departments can have a significant impact in a given year.

Why are some schools experiencing ongoing challenges, and what is being done?

When performance is broken down by the most able, middle-attaining and least-able learners, most Monmouthshire schools perform above expectation across these groups, even when contextual factors are taken into account. For example, one school is performing slightly below expectation for some learner groups, and this is that school's specific improvement challenge. Understanding the causes of such challenges happens through detailed subject-level analysis within schools and through engagement with governors, rather than being fully captured in the high-level report.

What learning can be taken from stronger-performing schools and applied elsewhere?

Structured sharing of practice takes place through school improvement networks, both within Monmouthshire and across the wider regional partnership. Schools and departments with stronger outcomes share approaches, teaching strategies and practice so that other schools and teachers can learn from them. This work is facilitated by the local authority and its school improvement partners and is part of the ongoing improvement cycle rather than a one-off exercise.

Are there any wider trends or common factors that can be shared?

A key overarching message from the data is that across Monmouthshire, schools generally perform above expectation for the most able learners, and largely above or close to expectation for middle and lower-attaining learners, regardless of the communities they serve. Where variation exists, it is school-specific rather than systemic, and addressed through targeted improvement work rather than broad authority-wide intervention.

Why is the variation greatest in the bottom third?

Variation in outcomes for the lowest-attaining learners is inherently greater because performance at this level is influenced by a wide range of complex and interacting factors. These include curriculum choices, qualification entry patterns, staffing changes within departments, individual pupil circumstances, and how pupils perform in assessments in a given year. Small changes in outcomes for lower-attaining learners can also have a disproportionately large effect on headline measures such as capped scores, for example where pupils move from no qualification to a low-grade pass. Because of this complexity, year-on-year variation in the bottom third is more pronounced and harder to interpret at a high level.

Is the data too variable to be meaningful for comparison, requiring a different route to identify issues?

The data is not meaningless, but it is designed to provide a high-level, contextual overview rather than detailed diagnostic insight into individual schools. Welsh Government policy deliberately limits how performance data is used, so that it supports understanding and improvement rather than public accountability or ranking. As a result, this type of report is intended to show broad patterns and relative positions, not to explain the detailed “why” behind performance differences. Drilling down into the causes of variation for individual schools would require far more granular analysis – typically undertaken by schools themselves using extensive national datasets and reported to governing bodies, with challenge provided through school improvement partners. The authority therefore holds a careful line between providing sufficient comparative information for scrutiny and remaining consistent with national expectations about the appropriate use of data.

For pupils who leave school at the end of Key Stage 4 with no qualifications, do we have robust post-16 tracking arrangements in place, and are we using schools’ understanding of the underlying reasons to ensure those young people are supported into appropriate pathways (for example through programmes such as Inspire)?

These pupils are recognised as being at high risk of becoming NEET. The authority has an early identification system that begins as early as Year 6, using a set of indicators to flag learners who may be at risk later in their school career. These learners are actively tracked through school and beyond. Post-16, tracking and support are provided through the Inspire project, which has recently secured continued funding, allowing Inspire workers to remain embedded in schools. This work is carried out in partnership with Careers Wales and focuses both on monitoring learners’ destinations after leaving school and on providing continued support where possible once they have finished compulsory education.

For pupils who are tracked as being at risk but still enter GCSE courses that result in F or G grades, do we know whether those pathways are experienced as positive and appropriate outcomes, or could earlier tracking be used more effectively to guide them into alternative routes that may offer a more meaningful and positive experience?

Schools are expected to design curricula and qualification pathways that reflect the needs of learners across the full ability range, ensuring that all pupils can access courses that are relevant, appropriate and purposeful. Schools have flexibility within measures such as the capped points score to include alternative qualifications alongside GCSEs, and this flexibility is intended to support pupils for whom traditional GCSE routes may not be the most suitable. Decisions about curriculum design and qualification entry are a key focus of professional discussions between schools and the local authority, particularly in the autumn term following examination results. During these discussions, schools are challenged on whether outcomes align with expectations and whether the curriculum offer is a fair and appropriate reflection of learners’ needs.

What is being done to ensure best practice is shared and embedded across all secondary schools?

Improvement work is long-standing and continuous, not triggered only by the current analysis. Each year, beginning in September, early data is reviewed through structured dialogue and challenge with school leaders, led by school improvement partners and local authority officers. This initial analysis identifies strengths, weaknesses and underperforming subjects, which then inform each school’s development priorities. Where weaknesses are identified – for example in science – schools are expected to direct leadership attention and professional learning accordingly, including engagement in subject networks, training, and best-practice sharing with other schools. The approach is explicitly framed as collective improvement, with the aspiration that all schools benefit from shared learning rather than isolated excellence.

Where some schools are performing significantly below modelled outcomes in key subjects such as science, what targeted action is being taken, and how is progress being monitored?

There is a variation in science outcomes but highlighted year-on-year movement rather than static underperformance. One school has significantly improved its position relative to family expectations, while another has moved in the opposite direction. These changes are used as the basis for targeted

professional challenge and support. Subject-specific improvement is addressed through leadership focus, professional learning and network engagement, rather than through public identification or comparison of individual schools.

Is strong performance in some schools masking weaker performance elsewhere?

When outcomes are examined across the full set of measures, the vast majority of indicators are at or above modelled expectations. Out of twelve performance measures referenced, only one was identified as clearly below expectation, with the remaining measures meeting or exceeding benchmarks. It is therefore important to maintain a balanced view, recognising areas for improvement without overstating systemic weakness.

Does the variation in outcomes point to inconsistent teaching quality or leadership across schools?

Variation does not automatically indicate widespread inconsistency in teaching or leadership. Differences are school-specific issues that are identified early, challenged through professional dialogue, and addressed through leadership decisions and support. Accountability is shared between school leaders, governing bodies and school improvement partners, with scrutiny operating at a system-level rather than at the level of individual school practice.

Why is performance weakest among the lowest-attaining pupils, and what additional or different support is being put in place to prevent these learners from falling further behind and becoming at risk of NEET?

There is one school where outcomes for lower-attaining pupils sit further below modelled expectations, and this represents a legitimate improvement challenge. However, across the wider system, performance for lower-attaining learners is largely at or close to expectation. The issue is therefore targeted rather than systemic, with intervention focused where the data shows it is most needed.

Are you content that the processes in place are strong enough, and that we are on the right path?

We have confidence that the authority is on the right path, while maintaining deliberately high expectations. There is clear year-on-year progress at local authority level, emphasizing improvement over time rather than simple comparison with the Welsh average. Confidence in the processes is grounded in the robust professional challenge and dialogue with headteachers, where outcomes are scrutinized, questioned and reflected upon in depth. We would caution against over-reliance on “modelled expectations”, which are statistical regression lines rather than true indicators of ambition. Instead, expectations should be set at the maximum level each cohort of learners can realistically achieve. GCSE outcomes are the culmination of a long-term, whole-system approach to education, beginning in the early years, and that continued focus on high-quality teaching and learning across the entire system is essential to sustaining and improving performance.

What factors are driving the decline in CAP 9 scores for FSM pupils, especially given that these scores are now marginally below the Wales FSM average for the first time?

We would warn against over-interpreting the visual data; the chart is truncated, which makes relatively small changes appear much larger. In practical terms, the change identified represents a difference of around two CAP 9 points, which is equivalent to roughly one-thirtieth of a GCSE grade per learner. While outcomes for FSM pupils in Wales have risen slightly and have dipped marginally in Monmouthshire – which is not the desired direction – the scale of the change is small rather than dramatic.

What is driving the divergence between FSM and non-FSM outcomes?

The issue should be placed in a long-term context, noting that narrowing the FSM attainment gap has been a persistent national challenge for over 25 years. Outcomes for FSM learners are influenced by a complex mix of factors, with the most significant being the quality of provision in individual classrooms. Improvements for lower-attaining and disadvantaged learners are having a positive effect across the cohort without disadvantaging higher-attaining pupils. The divergence is attributed to a combination of educational, social and contextual factors.

How does this emerging pattern sit with the authority's equity and inclusion objectives?

Tension with the authority's equity ambitions is acknowledged, but FSM learners remain a central focus of school-level and authority-level work. All schools have complex tracking systems that go beyond attainment data, incorporating pastoral support, wellbeing, attendance monitoring and close adult

intervention. Schools provide intensive, practical support to vulnerable learners, particularly around examination attendance, illustrating the extent of effort being made to mitigate disadvantage.

What targeted interventions or additional support are being put in place specifically to improve outcomes for pupils eligible for free school meals?

Targeted support is multi-layered and ongoing, rather than a single intervention. A key area of challenge and focus is attendance, which is closely linked to attainment. There is sustained scrutiny of how schools use the Pupil Development Grant, with schools routinely challenged on how funding is deployed to improve outcomes for FSM learners. The authority's approach is one of relentless focus and sustained effort, recognising that while progress is difficult and uneven, closing the gap remains a priority requiring continued attention.

What should the council say to parents and learners when the only readily available external comparison suggests Wales is under-performing internationally?

Monmouthshire is a Welsh local authority operating within a devolved Welsh education system, and that direct comparisons with other UK nations or international systems at GCSE level are problematic because qualification structures and grading systems differ. As a result, the most meaningful judgements about performance are made through like-for-like comparisons within the Welsh system, taking account of school context rather than headline international rankings. While acknowledging that PISA provides a national (Wales-wide) picture, it cannot be used to judge individual local authorities or schools. Reassurance to parents and learners is instead drawn from post-16 outcomes, where qualifications are more comparable across England and Wales and where Welsh learners have shown improving performance at A level, including growth in higher grades. This suggests that pupils are leaving GCSEs appropriately prepared for further study. The council's role is to ensure schools deliver the best possible education within the Welsh system, judged against appropriate contextual comparators, while wider international performance trends and reforms remain the responsibility of Welsh Government. – **ACTION: to bring a Key Stage 5 report to the committee in the future**

Chair's Summary:

The Chair thanked the officers for the report and their responses to the questions. The report was moved.

5. School Attendance Report - To scrutinise the latest figures on school attendances.

Sharon Randall-Smith delivered a presentation, introduced the report and answered the members' questions:

Is there any concern that some children recorded as home-educated might not be receiving a suitable education?

There are currently 192 electively home-educated pupils across the authority, and I am confident that these children are receiving a suitable education. Elective home education does not need to replicate school-based provision, provided it enables children to develop appropriate skills and achieve their potential. We have robust monitoring arrangements in place, including a dedicated elective home education officer who maintains regular contact with families, carries out visits where required and provides support. Where concerns arise, which is rare, we have the power to issue a School Attendance Order, although this has not been necessary in the past four years.

What interventions can be put in place to address the gap in attendance between FSM and non-FSM pupils?

The FSM/non-FSM attendance gap, particularly in secondary schools, is a priority area of concern. The gap at secondary level is wider than the Wales average, while the primary gap is smaller than the national picture. Gaps can sometimes widen even when attendance improves overall, particularly if non-FSM attendance rises more quickly. Progress is monitored not just through the size of the gap but also through improvements in FSM attendance levels themselves. Addressing the gap is a consistent focus in individual pupil-level discussions with schools, especially secondaries, with attention given to identifying barriers to attendance and putting appropriate support in place.

Are there any particular concerns that tend to come out of visits to home-schooled pupils, in terms of gaps in education?

No, and because elective home education does not follow a statutory curriculum, it is not assessed against school-based provision. Instead, officers look for evidence that children are developing core skills, particularly literacy, communication, numeracy, inquiry and exploration, including opportunities to develop scientific understanding through planned activities. The authority provides supportive engagement, including shared learning sessions and opportunities for pupils to come together for creative and practical activities. Visits generally confirm that education is suitable and flexible, with pupils making appropriate progress in key skill areas, and that the breadth of experiences available to home-educated learners is often different from, but not inferior to, those in school settings.

Are punitive measures for holiday absences still place and how much discretion is given to headteachers?

The response confirmed that headteachers retain discretion to authorise or refuse term-time holiday absences. The authority's guidance is that holidays should not normally be authorised, except in exceptional circumstances, and work is ongoing with school clusters to ensure a consistent understanding of what counts as "exceptional" across primary and secondary schools. The authority is not currently issuing fixed penalty notices for unauthorised holidays, reflecting the view that punitive measures do not generally improve attendance. However, this position is kept under review, and there may be limited circumstances in future where such measures are reconsidered. The key distinction remains between authorised and unauthorised absence, with formal intervention triggered when unauthorised absence leads to declining attendance.

The persistent absence threshold has been changed by Welsh Government from 20% to 10%. Does the authority still track absences at a 20% threshold?

The response confirmed that although Welsh Government has lowered the persistent absence threshold from 20% to 10%, the authority continues to track attendance across multiple thresholds, including 10%, 20%, 30%, 40% and up to 70%. This allows schools and the Education Welfare Service to maintain a detailed understanding of attendance patterns, identify different groups of pupils, and intervene proportionately. While there was an initial spike when the threshold changed, persistent absence has since declined across both primary and secondary schools, and regular monitoring ensures the authority knows where pupils sit and what support is in place for them.

Do you drill down into attendance data to identify trends within specific year groups, particularly where the overall report focuses on the whole picture?

Yes, year-group trends are routinely recorded and tracked with schools. These form part of a consultation document that informs discussions with schools and allows trends to be examined at year-group level rather than only at whole-school level.

Are trends within particular pupil groups or individual schools analysed to identify whether there are emerging or persistent attendance issues?

Attendance trends can be analysed by year group and by school. In primary schools, attendance tends to be higher and more consistent, though younger year groups are more affected by illness. In secondary schools, Year 7 typically shows the highest absence, with rates tailing off in later years. Some cohorts show consistently high absence throughout their school career, and these are closely monitored by Education Welfare Officers (EWOs), who use their detailed knowledge of schools and historical records to track patterns over time.

When pupils have been persistently absent, what practical steps are taken to support their return to school, such as phased reintegration or placement in a less intimidating classroom environment where appropriate?

Support for pupils returning after absence is tailored to individual circumstances. Short absences usually result in a normal return to school, while extended absences involve early contact with families through the FLOWS service. Trauma-informed approaches are used, and reintegration may include phased returns or other bespoke arrangements agreed with schools. The integration of family liaison officers has significantly strengthened this work.

Is there a breakdown of attendance figures into authorised and unauthorised absences?

Attendance data includes a clear breakdown of authorised and unauthorised absences, which can be reviewed at school and year-group level as part of monitoring and consultation processes.

How are absences related to unavoidable medical issues treated within the attendance data, and are these included in overall attendance figures or reported separately?

Authorised absences, including those related to medical issues, are still recorded as absences within attendance figures, but they are recognised as reasonable and agreed by the school. Unauthorised absences are treated differently, as they may trigger involvement from the service due to concerns about attendance and engagement.

How are school exclusions (including suspensions and expulsions) reported, are they included within this attendance report, and if not, how can scrutiny access data on exclusion trends across Monmouthshire schools – both in terms of whether figures are rising or falling and the underlying reasons – and should this be considered as a separate item for future scrutiny?

Exclusions are one of several factors that can explain why pupils are not attending school, alongside issues such as reduced timetables, social, emotional and mental health needs, flexi-schooling arrangements, and other contextual factors. Exclusion data has already been formally reported, with a recent report presented to this committee on 27th January, covering both permanent and temporary exclusions. That report provides detailed information for members who wish to examine trends and reasons in more depth. In addition, there is close operational coordination between the Education Welfare Service and colleagues responsible for exclusions, with register-checking information shared to ensure accuracy of figures and clear oversight of when pupils are excluded and when they return to school.

How are the root causes of non-attendance – such as behavioural issues, social, emotional and mental health needs, trauma and adverse childhood experiences – identified across services that sit in different directorates?

Non-attendance is recognised as having multiple and complex causes. Services work collectively within the same directorate and closely with inclusion colleagues to ensure children's needs are well understood. While the Education Welfare Service (EWS) cannot always meet specialist needs directly, these are regularly communicated to appropriate services that can provide targeted interventions. Schools also play a central role in identifying barriers and responding to pupils' individual needs.

Beyond responding to behaviour, what is being done to address underlying causes and prevent issues from escalating?

The approach combines specialist intervention where required with preventative work in schools. Schools are expected to provide a curriculum and wider provision that develops pupils' resilience and ability to cope with change as they grow older. Many schools are already implementing resilience-focused programmes and using a range of strategies to encourage regular attendance, supported by partner services reviewing and adapting provision where needed.

How is investment in social, emotional and mental health support being used proactively to build resilience and coping skills in pupils?

There is a strong emphasis on proactive support alongside reactive interventions. Schools are engaging in programmes designed to build pupil resilience and emotional understanding, while services work together to ensure children receive the appropriate support to attend school as regularly as possible. Additional staffing funded through the budget will further strengthen this work.

Is there scope to do more early intervention work in primary schools, particularly to support emotional development, trauma and key transitions such as adolescence?

The response acknowledges that this is a complex area and that earlier intervention is important. Many schools are already engaging in resilience-building programmes, and services continue to work collectively to strengthen early support. However, it is recognised that some pupils may still face medical or other significant barriers that limit attendance despite support.

Are directorates and scrutiny committees working together as effectively as they could to share information and learning across overlapping areas of responsibility?

Services are part of the same directorate and work closely together, bringing complementary perspectives and expertise. While there is always more that could be done, collaboration is strong and improving. Additional team capacity funded through the budget will support further joined-up working, with the shared aim of ensuring children receive the best possible support and opportunities to attend school wherever appropriate. Members are reminded that they can check published agendas for all committees for items of interest, but officers will also continue to be proactive in pointing members to potential areas of mutual interest across the committees.

Given the high levels of non-attendance among pupils – particularly those eligible for free school meals – and the well-established link between persistent absence, poor educational outcomes and later unemployment, what specific actions are being taken to address this issue early, especially in schools where absence rates are highest, in order to prevent young people becoming locked into long-term disadvantage?

Attendance among pupils eligible for free school meals is a specific and regular focus within consultations with schools. These pupils' attendance is discussed explicitly, alongside the strategies schools are using and the additional support being provided to improve engagement. In some cases, pupils may be temporarily out of school while awaiting support from wider services, and while not all such pupils are FSM-eligible, there is recognised overlap. This work is particularly concentrated in secondary schools and is reviewed through fortnightly meetings, alternating between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, meaning FSM pupils and those at risk of persistent absence are discussed monthly at minimum. Where concerns arise between meetings, these are followed up directly with schools to ensure timely intervention.

Chair's Summary:

Thank you for the report and the responses given to the members' questions. The report was moved.

6. Council and Cabinet Planner

Councillor Bond asked whether the Social Partnership and Public Procurement Act should be included as a future scrutiny item – this was agreed in principle, subject to space on an agenda. – **ACTION**

7. Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee Work Planner and Action List

The Chair requested that members be invited to the meeting of Governance & Audit committee at which the Panel Performance Assessment of the Council of the Council is tabled. – **ACTION**

Robert McGowan noted for members that several items have been added to the work programme since the agenda's publication, including the Chief Executive attending the next meeting to discuss For Purpose On Purpose (FPOP) through the lens of senior-level project management.

Will McLean confirmed that scrutiny of the new Welsh curriculum, as proposed as the last meeting, would be valuable, focusing on how well schools have implemented it and helping Members understand its structures, expectations and the six areas of learning and experience. This overview would then inform wider discussions about the direction of education in Monmouthshire and support future debates around new qualifications as their impact becomes clearer. – **ACTION**

8. To confirm minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes were agreed.

9. Next Meeting: 21st April 2026 at 10.00am

The meeting ended at 1.02 pm