

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Public Services Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Monday, 13th October, 2025 at 10.00 am

Councillors Present

County Councillor Armand Watts (Chair)
County Councillors: Jill Bond, Steven Garratt, Meirion Howells, Penny Jones, Tony Kear, Malcolm Lane, Dale Rooke, Frances Taylor, Ian Chandler, Jackie Strong and Peter Strong

Officers in Attendance

Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Sharran Lloyd, Community and Partner Development Manager
Amy Thomas, Regional Lead Advisor for Gwent Violence Against Women Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Team

APOLOGIES: None

1. Apologies for Absence

None received.

2. Declarations of Interest

None received.

3. Public Open Forum

None present.

4. VAWDASV Regional Strategy - To assess how the regional arrangements under the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 support the Council in delivering the Act's objectives.

Officers explained that the report was being presented to provide the Committee with a progress update of how the regional strategy supports the Council in delivering the objectives of the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015. The committee was asked to scrutinise these arrangements and provide feedback.

Sharran described the evolution from local to regional arrangements in Gwent, highlighting the establishment of a regional board to ensure equitable access to support services and reduce postcode lottery effects. The Gwent strategy aligns with national objectives and is due for review next year. She outlined the extensive board and subgroup structure, noting the lack of formal mechanisms for information sharing with Community Safety Partnerships, but assured that efforts are underway to strengthen these links. Monmouthshire is an active member, benefiting from shared resources, funding, and expertise.

Sharran highlighted the positive outcomes, which include mandatory staff training, regional IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advisor) services, and education/prevention programs like Spectrum. Challenges include data collection, service accessibility in rural areas, service gaps (e.g., for male victims and those with no recourse to public funds), resource allocation, and communication.

Sharran introduced a presentation covering strategic governance, integration, monitoring, data challenges, and benefits to Monmouthshire from regional commissioning. She emphasized the importance of collaboration, the role of subgroups, and the need for improved data and communication mechanisms.

Amy detailed the regional team's structure and support mechanisms, including pooled resources, specialist expertise, and regional funding. She highlighted statutory and specialist training (Ask and Act), collaborative projects, and awareness campaigns. Amy discussed the Spectrum program for schools, targeted support for diverse and rural communities, and recent training for staff on supporting victims with no recourse to public funds. She noted the presence of specialist advisors for older people and those in health settings.

Amy acknowledged ongoing challenges with data collection and needs assessments, reliance on police/probation data, and the resource-intensive nature of comprehensive assessments. The regional approach enables thematic needs assessments and cross-referencing with other duties (e.g., serious violence).

Both officers called for improved data collection, enhanced training, increased community engagement, regular progress reviews, and deeper collaboration to ensure effective support for victims and continued strategy impact.

Questions from Members:

- Councillor Bond asked how the regional arrangements measure impact and whether they are fit for purpose, given the lack of comprehensive data over the years.

Amy replied that the VAWDASV Act is 10 years old and that measuring impact has been challenging due to evolving needs, COVID, and reliance on police/probation data. She stated the regional arrangements are fit for purpose and provide Monmouthshire with access to specialist services and expertise, such as the regional IDVA team.

- Councillor Bond also queried the tangible benefits for Monmouthshire residents and how local accountability is supported, asking what the return on investment is for Monmouthshire, and whether board members are paid, and if more local resources are needed to address data gaps.

Amy advised that board members are not paid; they participate on top of their regular roles. The chair is the strategic director for Social Services in Newport, and Sharran represents Monmouthshire.

She acknowledged there is a lack of dedicated data analyst resource; current data analysis relies on partner organisations, especially public health. More resource is needed for meaningful data interpretation. She explained that for victims, the regional approach means more robust pathways, closer collaboration, and seamless access to services, regardless of where they present.

- Councillor Jones expressed concern about accountability and governance, noting disappointment that the board chair did not attend the committee. She asked about the Spectrum program: whether it is expanding, how many schools are involved, and why it targets only years 2, 5, and 9, expressing the view that older students (years 12 and 13) should also be prioritised.

Amy explained Spectrum is funded by Welsh Government and recently changed to ensure all schools in Wales receive provision for years 2, 5, and 9 as a minimum, with additional year groups available on request by schools. Previously, provision depended on school requests, leading to patchy coverage.

For older students, Amy noted there are other community-based programs and grant-funded initiatives (like Empowering Future) to cover those not reached by Spectrum, and that schools now have a dedicated advisor to support delivery of the relationships and sexuality education curriculum.

Amy confirmed that all schools will now receive Spectrum provision, addressing previous inconsistencies.

Councillor Jones added that rural children might miss out on some community-based programs but was reassured by the universal school coverage.

- Councillor Kear asked about the role of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) in the partnership board, given the PCC's focus on protecting the vulnerable and tackling violence against women and girls.

Amy advised that the Deputy PCC is a member of the VAWDASV Partnership Board and that there is strong collaboration with the PCC's office, including regular meetings and joint planning for funding and project delivery.

- Councillor Kear requested clarification on how the partnership links with Gwent Police, especially regarding the availability and use of detailed crime data for Monmouthshire.

Sharran stated that Gwent Police provide detailed data, which is the primary local source, but challenges remain in analysing and contextualizing this data for Monmouthshire due to limited analytical capacity. The team is working with public health to improve this.

- Councillor Kear also asked what work is being done to address violence against men, not just women and girls.

Amy clarified that all services in Gwent are open to male victims, and efforts are made to ensure men feel included and represented in communications and service access,

despite the legislative language focusing on women and girls. She confirmed that campaigns and resources are designed to be inclusive of men, and recent work has specifically engaged young men and boys.

- Councillor Garratt asked if there is any work being done to measure the effectiveness of outreach to schools and the community, specifically whether there are follow-up interviews, surveys, or evaluations with survivors to assess if messaging led them to use services.

Amy explained that during public awareness events, feedback cards are collected and reviewed to inform future campaigns. For example, feedback from a Caldicot event led to clearer messaging about support services for both victims and concerned individuals.

- Councillor Garratt queried if the promotion and training are being monitored for effectiveness and if feedback is used to improve future outreach.

Amy added that all specialist sector services conduct exit surveys with survivors before case closure, covering service effectiveness, inclusivity, and practical aspects. Survivors are also invited to join forums to provide ongoing feedback for continuous improvement.

- Councillor Rooke asked how local needs are understood and prioritised in the absence of robust data.

Sharran acknowledged the difficulty in developing baseline data for Monmouthshire and explained that current service delivery relies on visible demand and pressure points, with efforts ongoing to improve data analysis for more effective resource targeting.

- Councillor Rooke also queried whether there is sufficient resourcing and capacity in Monmouthshire, especially after the loss of the local domestic abuse coordinator.

Sharran stated that losing a dedicated coordinator impacts capacity, but now responsibility is distributed across multiple departments, making domestic abuse more embedded in business as usual, though it does not fully replace the benefits of a dedicated post. Amy added that this integration means a broader range of staff are now involved in the regional structures.

- Councillor Howells shared information about an upcoming annual "Light a Candle" service in Usk at St Mary's Church, organized by the Women's Institute, to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Mentioned a banner parade, stalls, guest speakers, and an invitation for men to participate. Also expressed appreciation for upcoming councillor training on the topic.

Amy confirmed that the event organisers had contacted the regional team, and the event would be promoted through their campaign communications group and included in a bulletin sent to professionals across the region.

- Councillor Jackie Strong highlighted the issue of violence against older women, sharing that the oldest woman accepted into a refuge was in her 90s, emphasising the vulnerability of older women, especially those living alone. She noted the significant impact of COVID-19 on victims' ability to seek help. Jackie also mentioned hearing critiques about the effectiveness of the MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) process, referencing a case where a family felt it did not work as intended. She encouraged continued support, more resources, and feedback from survivors and others to improve services.
- Councillor Peter Strong noted the importance of professional experience in understanding domestic abuse trends, especially given data limitations. He stated that he regarded certain areas of Gwent to appear to have more serious domestic abuse cases reaching court, and questioned whether this reflects actual differences, reporting rates, or other factors.

Amy explained there is no specific evidence that any Gwent area has more cases going to court; reporting and escalation to court can vary widely based on individual circumstances.

- Councillor Peter Strong asked if differences in reporting or case outcomes could be attributed to regional variations and sought Amy's perspective based on her experience.

Amy described the support available for victims through police and advocacy services, and noted that reasons for reporting or withdrawing from the justice process are complex and varied. She outlined mechanisms in place to track attrition rates in the criminal justice process and highlighted special measures to support victims in court. Amy emphasised that all victims receive a tailored response, and that much abuse remains unreported, making it difficult to draw firm conclusions from available data.

- Councillor Bond asked how the reported increase in misogynistic language and behaviour in schools (as informed by the Education Directorate) is being addressed, and whether this informs the direction of the Spectrum program for early prevention.

Amy explained that Spectrum delivers sessions mapped to the curriculum, focusing on online harm, grooming, sexting, and related issues, but not directly targeting misogyny; however, new AVECS Cwtch advisors and the Empowering Futures project are working with schools to address misogynistic behaviour and promote healthy relationships, especially among boys and young men. She also referenced a global movement, "She Is Not Your Rehab," being introduced locally to shift culture.

- Councillor Bond requested clarification on who is ultimately responsible for the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) Act in Monmouthshire, given that the agenda is now embedded across all directorates.

Sharran clarified that responsibility under the Act formally lies with the chief executive of the relevant authority, but in practice, the chief officer (Matt Gatehouse) and herself (as the nominated lead) coordinate the agenda in Monmouthshire.

- Councillor Watts asked how Monmouthshire can be assured it has adopted the intended culture around domestic abuse after losing the dedicated coordinator, and whether staff across all directorates are receiving the required training.

Sharran explained that the Community Safety Partnership ensures multi-agency involvement, with all relevant directorates engaged, but acknowledged the approach is currently more reactive than proactive due to data limitations. She confirmed that mandatory training is in place for staff, with about 80% completion, and committed to sharing the latest figures with members.

- Councillor Watts questioned what tangible benefits Monmouthshire is getting from the regional arrangements, given the lack of comprehensive data and limited specialist resources and requested specifics on staff training and school participation in the Spectrum program.

Amy listed tangible benefits: statutory training delivery, specialist training, partnership coordination, and pooled regional resources. She noted that while the regional team provides expertise and support, the lack of a comprehensive data dashboard is a Wales-wide issue, not unique to Monmouthshire. She confirmed only three schools (two primary, one comprehensive) have received Spectrum sessions so far, covering 354 pupils and 20 teachers, and acknowledged there is a long way to go for full coverage.

Chairs Summary:

The Chair thanked Amy for attending and answering Members' questions and thanked Sharran for producing the progress report. The Committee agreed to schedule further progress updates within their forward work programme, but agreed the following actions would be requested from officers when the topic returns to scrutiny:

- Members request that subsequent updates provide clearer evidence of impact, including a consistent regional and local data dashboard (covering demand, outcomes, equality of access and rural reach), clearer lines of accountability between the Partnership Board, Community Safety Partnerships and the Council, and regular reporting on training compliance and Spectrum programme coverage.
- The Committee also asks that future reports set out resource requirements (including analytical capacity), progress against agreed actions with timescales, and how survivor and community feedback is being captured and used to improve services.

5. Public Services Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

The work programme was noted.

6. Council and Cabinet Work Planner

Noted.

7. To approve the minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the 7th July 2025 were agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

8. Next Meeting: Tuesday 28th October 2025 at 10.00am (Special Meeting).

Action List:

No.	Action	Responsible	Timescale
1	<p>Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 Scrutiny</p> <p>Members request that subsequent updates provide clearer evidence of impact, including a consistent regional and local data dashboard (covering demand, outcomes, equality of access and rural reach), clearer lines of accountability between the Partnership Board, Community Safety Partnerships and the Council, and regular reporting on training compliance and Spectrum programme coverage.</p> <p>The Committee also asks that future reports set out resource requirements (including analytical capacity), progress against agreed actions with timescales, and how survivor and community feedback is being captured and used to improve services.</p>	Sharran Lloyd and Thomas Amy	Future Progress Updates

The meeting ended at **1.11 pm**