

# ***Monmouthshire Scrutiny***

## **Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee ~ Feedback to Cabinet of Meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2025**

### **Report Item 4: Welsh Language Annual Report 2024–25**

The committee reviewed the council's performance in meeting Welsh language standards. Officers explained that the preferred option for improving cost-effectiveness in translation services is to collaborate with Torfaen, due to the similarity in document types. A "non-opinion review" was described as an internal audit tool used to identify compliance gaps without issuing a formal audit opinion. While 100% compliance remains the goal, the review helps guide improvements. Questions were raised about missing standards in the report, which officers clarified were excluded based on the Welsh Language Commissioner's guidelines. Of the 53 staff who completed training, most were at beginner level and the rest at foundation. Maintaining parity between Welsh and English digital content remains a challenge, addressed through monitoring and training. It was acknowledged that few senior officers are fluent in Welsh, though efforts are underway to improve this. A recent incident in Abergavenny highlighted the need for Welsh-speaking media representatives. Initiatives like lanyards and Welsh tips in newsletters have been well received, and future plans include expanding opportunities for staff to use Welsh. Collaboration with other public bodies is ongoing through regional groups and social care initiatives. Officers welcomed a member's suggestion to explore community learning opportunities. On costs, it was explained that translation is the main expense – over £226,000 last year – while most other compliance work is embedded in staff roles and not separately tracked. AI was discussed as a potential cost-saving tool, though it cannot replace human translators due to the need for proofreading. However, systems like translation memory tools used by Torfaen may offer future efficiencies.

#### **Chair's Conclusion:**

The Chair thanked the officers and Cabinet Member for the report and their responses to the committee's questions.

### **Report Item 5: Public Protection Performance 2024–25**

The committee examined the performance of the public protection service. High-risk food premises are inspected based on the nature of their operations and compliance levels, with inspection frequency adjusted accordingly. A drop in FOI requests was attributed to a previous high-profile case that had inflated numbers. The Event Safety Advisory Group (ESAG) process remains voluntary, with referrals based on risk. The vacancy in the head of public protection post is under review by senior leadership. Performance dips in areas like fly-tipping and noise complaints were linked to

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increased workloads, with prioritisation now based on risk and outcomes. Housing above takeaways, particularly regarding fire safety, is a renewed focus this year. Officers noted a rise in animal welfare concerns, especially on farms, due to the cost-of-living crisis. Each notifiable disease case, including E.coli, is thoroughly investigated using the Taran database, which helps identify patterns and potential sources. Enforcement of single-use vape regulations is challenging, with support from Welsh Government and collaboration with HMRC. Online sales of vapes present additional difficulties. The team balances reactive and proactive work through daily risk assessments and service plans. Some proactive work, like inspections of housing above takeaways, was postponed but is now being prioritised. Staff safety during enforcement is managed through risk assessments and police involvement when necessary.

### **Chair's Conclusion:**

The Chair thanked the officers for the report and their responses to the committee's questions, and expressed thanks on behalf of the committee and residents for the team's valuable work.

### **Report Item 6: Registration Services Annual Report 2024–25**

The committee reviewed the performance of registration services. The lower percentage of timely birth registrations was explained by the small number of births in Monmouthshire, which skews statistics. Delays in death registrations were attributed to the new statutory process involving medical examiners, which is expected to stabilise. A notable rise in wedding ceremonies was linked to post-COVID backlogs and Monmouthshire's growing popularity as a wedding destination. Upcoming legislative changes aim to digitise the registration process, though timelines remain uncertain. Despite seasonal pressures, the part-time ceremonial staff have maintained service levels, with strong teamwork and flexibility. Concerns were raised about the lack of progress on marriage law reforms following the Law Commission's review, but registrars continue to monitor and address issues like sham or coerced marriages. Clarification was provided that only 21 births occurred in Monmouthshire, with the remainder registered on behalf of Torfaen, while the 1,019 deaths figure reflects actual local deaths.

### **Chair's Conclusion:**

The Chair thanked the officers for the report and their responses to the committee's questions, and expressed gratitude from the committee to the wider team.