

People Scrutiny 28th May 2026

Jackie Strong, John Crook, Martyn Groucutt, Jan Butler, Christopher Edwards, Penny Jones, Sue Riley, Maria Stevens, Angela Sandles

Stacey Jones, Craig O'Connor, Robert McGowan

The meeting closed at 11:09.

1. Election of Chair.

Jackie Strong was proposed by John Crook, seconded by Maria Stevens. There were no other nominations and the vote was carried.

2. Appointment of Vice Chair.

John Crook was proposed by Martyn Groucutt, seconded by Maria Stevens. There were no other nominations and the vote was carried. It was clarified that Councillor Crook is now a permanent member of the committee, replacing Councillor Riley.

3. Apologies for Absence.

Maureen Powell (recovering from operation). Simon Howarth, Sue Riley as substitute.

4. Declarations of Interest.

None.

5. Public Open Forum.

None.

6. Investment Package for Caldicot Leisure Centre: Consideration of proposed investment to improve facilities at Caldicot Leisure Centre.

Cabinet Member Angela Sandles introduced the report:

The report sets out a proposed investment in Caldicot Leisure Centre to ensure it remains a key strategic leisure asset for the south of the county. The investment aligns with wider council objectives, including healthier communities, improved wellbeing, sustainable services, and modern community infrastructure. The need for investment has been recognised for some time, with previous attempts to secure Levelling Up Fund support unsuccessful.

The proposal represents a shift in approach: instead of waiting for external funding, the Council is looking to deliver achievable improvements using its own resources. It is presented as a practical and deliverable step forward, ensuring progress is not delayed by lack of grant funding. The investment would complement other recent improvements in Caldicot, supporting a more coordinated approach across the site.

Overall, the proposal aims to modernise facilities, improve customer experience, protect the centre's role within the MonLife portfolio, and support long-term sustainability. The report is framed as an opportunity to move from aspiration to action, delivering realistic and meaningful improvements.

Stacey Jones delivered a presentation, covering the following points:

The purpose of the proposal is to invest in and refurbish the first-floor fitness suite at Caldicot Leisure Centre. The scheme is intended to modernise the existing facility, improve the overall customer experience, increase capacity, and support growth in membership. It is positioned as a necessary intervention to protect the long-term sustainability of the Council's leisure service by ensuring that the offer remains relevant and attractive to users.

The rationale for investment is based on the current condition of the facilities, which are dated and no longer meet modern expectations. The existing fitness equipment is over 18 years old and is no longer considered fit for purpose. Without investment, there is a recognised risk to the sustainability of the service, as customer retention and growth may decline. This presents a direct financial risk, given that fitness memberships represent a significant source of income for the leisure service.

The scope of the scheme includes the refurbishment and reconfiguration of the main gym and first-floor areas, with the creation of a modern 40-station fitness suite. Improvements will also be made to smaller gym areas, studios, multi-purpose spaces, and circulation areas to enhance usability and flow. The project includes a full refurbishment of toilet facilities (male, female, and accessible), as well as upgrades to core infrastructure such as flooring, lighting, power, data, and decoration. In addition, there will be a full replacement of fitness equipment, supported by a significant investment in new, modern equipment.

The funding approach combines capital funding of approximately £300,000 with borrowing of just over £300,000. The borrowing element will be repaid over a 10-year period, with annual repayments of around £40,000. These repayments are expected to be met through increased income generated by additional memberships as a result of the improved facilities.

Income assumptions underlying the proposal indicate that an increase of around 100 additional memberships would generate approximately £41,000 per year, which would be sufficient to cover the borrowing costs. Confidence in these projections is based on evidence from other sites where similar investment has led to measurable growth in membership.

A number of key risks have been identified. These include cost uncertainty until final design work and surveys are completed, as well as the potential for issues related to asbestos or ageing infrastructure. There is also a risk of service disruption during the works, which are estimated to take between 12 and 15 weeks, with alternative provision to be explored during this period. In addition, there is an income risk if membership growth is slower or lower than anticipated.

In conclusion, the proposal is presented as a targeted and deliverable investment aimed at modernising an under-invested asset, protecting income streams, and supporting healthier communities. It forms part of a wider package of improvements at Caldicot Leisure Centre, contributing to a coordinated and comprehensive enhancement of the site.

Questions

Stacey Jones answered the members' questions with Craig O'Connor:

What evidence is there that there is sufficient demand for the upgraded facilities? Has there been meaningful consultation with users and residents?

There is clear evidence of demand for upgraded facilities, informed by ongoing engagement with the existing customer base and regular monitoring of membership patterns. Membership cancellations are routinely reviewed, and feedback consistently identifies dissatisfaction with the current upstairs fitness offer. Users report that the existing provision is outdated, with ageing and unreliable equipment that is no longer fit for purpose, particularly when compared to other sites where members pay the same fee but receive a more modern experience.

In addition to this ongoing customer feedback, wider engagement with users and the community indicates that demand would increase if the facility were modernised. This engagement demonstrates that the condition and quality of the fitness offer is a key factor affecting both retention and potential growth in membership.

Will the leisure centre be competitive compared to other local facilities?

At present, the leisure centre is not fully competitive with other local facilities, primarily due to the outdated nature of its fitness provision. The ageing equipment and lack of modern facilities place it at a disadvantage compared to alternative providers offering more up-to-date environments for the same or similar cost. Investment in upgraded facilities would address these issues and bring the site in line with current expectations of leisure users. Evidence from comparable sites shows that improvements to facilities typically lead to increased membership levels and higher usage. As such, modernisation is expected to significantly enhance the centre's competitiveness within the local market.

Who will benefit most from the upgraded facilities (e.g. families, schools, older residents, disabled users)?

The upgraded facilities are intended to be inclusive and accessible, benefiting a broad range of user groups across the community. The design and equipment will support school pupils, including through lunchtime and after-school use, as well as families and general community users seeking improved fitness and leisure opportunities. In addition, the upgrades will accommodate users who require accessible facilities, ensuring that the centre can be used by individuals with a wide range of needs. Overall, the improvements are designed to provide a modern, inclusive offer that is usable and beneficial to all sections of the community rather than targeting a single user group.

How will the investment attract new users, and how will it be promoted?

The investment is expected to attract new users by delivering a modernised facility that aligns with current expectations and demand for fitness services. The planned opening date of January 2027 has been deliberately selected to coincide with the peak period for new memberships, when demand for health and fitness services is typically at its highest.

A comprehensive promotional approach will be implemented to maximise engagement. This will include digital promotion and the use of QR codes at sites, alongside direct engagement through schools and communication channels with parents. The council's marketing and leisure teams will play a central role in promoting the upgraded offer, supported by promotion across other council services and venues.

In addition, collaboration with town councils and sports development teams will help extend reach into the wider community. This combined approach brings together existing customer engagement

with broader outreach activity, ensuring that awareness of the upgraded facilities reaches both current users and potential new customers.

Is the funding already in place, or will the project be put on hold until funding is guaranteed?

The funding required for the project is already in place, with a capital match funding pot having been earmarked for the Council. This funding is available for the 2026–27 financial year and can be drawn down if the scheme receives approval. As the funding has already been set aside, there is no anticipated delay in accessing it, and the project would not need to be put on hold pending confirmation of funding.

Is the borrowing subject to affordability, and what happens if the refurbishment goes over budget? Is there a contingency?

Borrowing for the project is subject to affordability; however, analysis undertaken to date indicates that the scheme is affordable within current projections. Leisure service income is performing above forecast, which supports confidence in the overall funding model and its sustainability.

In terms of managing financial risk, a 10% contingency has been built into the project costs, providing a buffer against unforeseen expenditure. In addition, further risk allowances—such as approximately £30,000 for potential issues including asbestos or electrical works—have been incorporated. While there is flexibility to review affordability and borrowing requirements if costs change, the project is currently considered deliverable within the agreed financial envelope.

Is the £300k for equipment a separate amount, or part of the overall cost?

The £300,000 allocated for equipment forms part of the overall project funding envelope and is not an additional or separate amount. The total scheme cost is broadly divided between building and refurbishment works and investment in new equipment, with both elements included within the same overall budget.

How will the scheme ensure accessibility, particularly for an ageing population and people with disabilities?

The scheme will ensure accessibility by incorporating a range of gym equipment designed to be inclusive and suitable for users of all abilities. The internal layout will be reconfigured to improve accessibility, including increased space between equipment to support ease of movement. This will enable better access for wheelchair users and individuals with mobility needs. Overall, the approach is to provide the most flexible and inclusive equipment and layout possible within the constraints of the existing building, ensuring that the facility can accommodate a wide range of users, including an ageing population and those with disabilities.

Will the upgrades to toilets and facilities comply with current legal requirements, including recent guidance on single-sex provision?

All refurbishment works will take account of current legislation and any recent changes in guidance to ensure full compliance. The upgraded toilet and facility provision will meet applicable legal requirements and recognised standards, including those relating to single-sex provision where relevant. Furthermore, the design and delivery of the scheme will remain responsive to any new or emerging legal requirements, ensuring that compliance is maintained throughout the project.

Does the scheme risk focusing too much on accessible toilets rather than ensuring full accessibility of the gym equipment and wider facility?

The scheme does not focus solely on accessible toilets but instead seeks to improve accessibility across the entire fitness provision. The current facility does not adequately meet accessibility expectations, particularly in relation to equipment and layout. In response, the proposed improvements will introduce modern, more user-friendly equipment designed to support a wider range of users. In addition, the layout will be redesigned to provide greater space and flexibility, enabling improved access for wheelchair users and others with mobility needs. The overall intention is to ensure that users are able to actively participate in fitness activities, rather than simply observe, within the constraints of the existing building.

Will there be sufficient staff and support available to ensure accessible use of the facility (e.g. assistance with equipment and considerate use of space)?

There will be trained staff and fitness coaches available to support users in accessing and using the facilities. This includes the provision of dedicated programmes that can be tailored to individual needs, ensuring that users are able to engage effectively with the equipment. Staff-led support, including referral-based programmes, will help to promote inclusive use of the facility and ensure that individuals who require additional assistance are able to participate fully.

Has there been an assessment of private fitness facilities in the area, and how confident are we that the new development can compete? What is the unique selling point (USP)?

The proposed leisure centre offer is not intended to compete directly on a like-for-like basis with private gyms, as it provides a broader and more integrated range of services. The centre combines gym facilities with a swimming pool, outdoor provision, and wider leisure activities, which private operators do not typically offer. This integrated approach is considered particularly attractive to families and users with varied needs, for example those who may wish to combine swimming lessons with gym use. In addition, the new equipment will be modern, premium-quality equipment comparable to that found in private gyms, ensuring that the fitness offer remains competitive despite the spatial constraints of the existing building.

How confident are we that the investment will improve footfall?

There is a strong level of confidence that the investment will lead to increased footfall, supported by evidence from other sites where similar improvements have been undertaken. For example, recent investment at Chepstow has resulted in significant growth in memberships. It is also recognised that modern, lighter, and more attractive environments encourage higher levels of usage. The proposed improvements extend beyond physical infrastructure to include enhancements in customer experience, digital systems, and overall service delivery, all of which are expected to contribute to increased engagement. On this basis, the target for additional memberships is considered achievable across the wider leisure portfolio.

During the transition period (while works are underway), have arrangements been explored with private providers to support service continuation?

The transcript does not record a direct response to the question of whether private facilities will be utilised during the transition period. However, it is noted elsewhere that alternative provision will be

explored to mitigate the impact of temporary disruption to services while works are underway, although no specific reference is made to formal arrangements with private providers.

Will the refurbished facility address the current appearance (e.g. dark and dated interior)?

The refurbishment scheme is intended to deliver a modern, lighter, and more visually appealing environment. Improvements to the layout, interior design, and overall presentation are expected to transform the current appearance of the facility, addressing concerns about its dark and dated character. These changes are also anticipated to enhance the overall customer experience and increase the attractiveness of the centre to both existing and potential users.

Has there been any indication from the new Welsh Government of increased funding for leisure facilities?

It was noted that it was still very early following the recent Senedd election, and as such no clear funding position had yet been established by the new Welsh Government. The Council had begun engaging with newly appointed Cabinet Secretaries to explore potential funding opportunities; however, no confirmed additional funding was currently known. The proposal therefore reflected a decision to proceed without waiting for external funding, recognising the need to act in a timely manner. The investment package was also designed to be flexible, with equipment that could be relocated in the future should further funding or redevelopment opportunities arise.

What lessons have been learned from similar leisure centre improvement projects elsewhere in Monmouthshire?

A number of key lessons had been identified from previous leisure centre improvement projects. These included the importance of ensuring adequate space between equipment, rather than maximising capacity at the expense of usability and user experience. There was also an emphasis on selecting equipment that met user needs, informed by ongoing feedback and input from both fitness managers and users.

In addition, the Council had drawn on wider sector experience through its partners, including organisations such as Alliance Leisure and equipment providers. It was recognised that investment in high-quality equipment is a critical driver of membership growth. However, improvements were not limited to equipment alone; the creation of modern, bright environments and the delivery of a high-quality customer experience were also identified as essential components in achieving successful outcomes.

How often does the Council review underused facilities?

Facilities were monitored on a monthly basis using live data from systems that track membership trends, usage levels, and the capacity of activities and classes. This regular monitoring enabled performance to be reviewed consistently and trends in both use and underuse to be identified.

Where facilities were found to be underused and could not immediately be improved, efforts were made to maximise the use of other areas, for example by expanding swimming provision. In addition, at a management level, there were monthly directorate reviews of assets, which considered factors such as income performance, viability, and resource use and capacity. This approach provided ongoing oversight and the ability to adapt services as required.

How will the scheme avoid excluding people who are unable to use digital systems or apps when accessing leisure services?

The scheme will ensure that access to leisure services is not limited to digital platforms by maintaining a range of non-digital alternatives alongside digital promotion. Information and promotional campaigns will be made available through posters and on-site materials, ensuring that users can access key details without needing to rely on digital tools. In addition, face-to-face support will be provided by reception staff and other site staff, who will be available to assist users directly.

The approach will also include in-person engagement through sports development teams and wider community outreach activity, allowing information to be shared through established local networks such as schools, clubs, and other community channels. For users who may require additional support with digital systems, staff will be able to assist directly, including through the use of devices such as tablets at reception. Overall, this blended approach is intended to ensure that individuals without access to, or confidence in using, digital systems can still receive information and fully access services.

Will there still be a community suite and viewing area on the first floor after the refurbishment?

The viewing area will be retained as part of the refurbishment and will continue to be available for use following completion of the works. This ensures that users will still be able to access a designated space for viewing activities within the facility.

Will the lift be refurbished or upgraded, given concerns about accessibility?

The lift is not included within the scope of this particular refurbishment package. However, lifts across the authority have been separately identified and surveyed by property services, and there is a dedicated budget in place for lift repairs and replacements. These works are prioritised based on the condition of individual lifts. At present, no specific timetable has been confirmed for works to this lift.

Are there many private gyms in the Severnside area, and how does this affect the need for the facility?

There is limited private gym provision within the Severnside area, resulting in the Council's leisure centre offer being relatively distinctive and important within the local context. This lack of extensive private competition supports the expectation that the facility will continue to be well used by local residents and reinforces the need for a modernised, accessible public leisure offer.

How can rural communities, such as Raglan, access similar funding and support for leisure and community facilities, given the apparent lack of provision and limited investment compared to towns? Funding appears to favour towns over rural areas, despite these issues having been raised over many years. Can there be more immediate and tangible action?

There are a number of potential funding routes available to support rural communities, including the use of Section 106 contributions linked to new developments. The Council is able to work collaboratively with community councils to identify and pursue appropriate funding opportunities. This includes providing support to help identify external funding sources and to develop and submit funding applications. Engagement with the new Welsh Government may present additional funding

opportunities in the future, although these are not yet defined. The overall approach is to work jointly with local communities to explore available options and progress suitable proposals.

Why was an Integrated Impact Assessment not provided with the report?

An Integrated Impact Assessment had been prepared but was not included within the Scrutiny report papers. The assessment would instead be included as part of the Cabinet report and would be shared with Members in advance of Cabinet, providing an opportunity for review and comment. We apologise for the omission of the assessment at the Scrutiny stage. We would emphasise that the scheme is intended to deliver significant improvements in accessibility and inclusivity. This includes the incorporation of a range of accessible equipment and an improved layout, designed to support users of all ages and needs.

A member recalled that previous proposals had been made to relocate or replace the leisure centre, including commitments linked to development of nearby land. She noted that these proposals did not materialise, leaving the community with the existing ageing facility. She highlighted that residents are now looking forward to improvements, even if this is a refurbishment rather than a new build. She reflected a positive but cautious community perspective, recognising past unmet expectations but expressing support for the current proposal.

Chair's Summary:

Thank you for the report – this work is certainly needed. We need to ensure that residents know about how to access facilities if they are moved elsewhere. Members have noted that there is an ongoing pattern about the absence of IIAs, or insufficient ones, so that needs to be addressed going forward. Thank you again to the Cabinet Member and officers.

7. People Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Plan.

A query was raised regarding items that had been agreed by the committee at the last meeting but are not on the forward work programme. It was clarified that these matters had been raised as questions to the Cabinet Member through the Public Open Forum item, rather than as formal additions to the work programme. As such, they remain pending a response from the Cabinet Member, after which it may be appropriate to incorporate specific items into the scrutiny work programme. Officers will chase that response – **ACTION**

There is a duplication error in the forward plan, with the Youth Service item now coming to the September meeting.

It was confirmed that a future item on homelessness legislation, scheduled for the July meeting, would include specific consideration of the impacts on care leavers, particularly those placed out of county. In addition, it was agreed that issues raised through the Corporate Parenting Panel should be fed into the scrutiny work programme to ensure that relevant concerns are properly considered. –

ACTION

A suggestion was made to incorporate lived experience input into future scrutiny discussions, for example through short contributions from individuals directly affected by homelessness legislation. It was agreed that this approach would add value and should be utilised where appropriate to inform and strengthen scrutiny.

It was noted that a letter to the Health Board regarding assistive technology had previously been discussed, but there remained some uncertainty as to whether this had been progressed. It was agreed that this should be followed up. In addition, a suggestion was made to invite representatives from the Health Board to attend a future meeting to explain their role in relation to assistive technology and provide further clarification to the committee. – **ACTIONS**

The Chair noted that members wish to avoid meetings being scheduled in half term in the future.

8. Council and Cabinet Forward Work Programme.

Noted.

9. To approve the following minutes:

- **9a. People Scrutiny Committee – 24th February 2026.**
- **9b. Special Meeting of People Scrutiny Committee – 29th April 2026.**

The minutes were confirmed.

10. Next Meeting: Thursday 18th June 2026 at 10.00am.