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Tuesday, 30 June 2026

Notice of Reports Received following Publication of Agenda.

Cabinet

Wednesday, 8th July, 2026 at 4.30 pm,
Steve Greenslade Room, County Hall, Usk

Attached are reports that the committee will consider as part of the original agenda but were submitted to democratic services following publication of the agenda.

Item No	Item	Pages
2.1	Performance & Overview Scrutiny Committee - Feedback to Cabinet of Meetings held in June 2026.	1 - 12

Paul Matthews
Chief Executive

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Monmouthshire Scrutiny

Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee ~ Feedback to Cabinet of Meeting held on 30th June 2026

Report Item 5: Draft Self-Assessment of performance of the Council's Community and Corporate Plan Objectives 2025/26

Key Issues raised by the Committee:

- The Community and Corporate Plan involve a significant amount of work. To what extent does the plan shape the Council's activities and priorities, rather than simply describing what is already happening?

  Response: Matt Gatehouse (Chief Officer for People, Performance and Partnerships) advised that the Community and Corporate Plan, approved at the start of the Council term, translates the administration's ambitions into organisational priorities and actions. It guides service delivery but remains flexible, with emerging risks, opportunities, funding and changing priorities reflected through later Council, Cabinet or Single Member decisions.

- Residents tend to judge the Council by visible services such as roads, refuse collection, schools and responsiveness to reported issues. The report uses terms such as "on track" and "good progress", but what objective evidence demonstrates improvements that residents would actually recognise?

  Response: Richard Jones (Performance and Data Insight Manager) explained that the assessment uses resident surveys, service-user feedback, scrutiny, inspections, performance data and business plans to balance measurable outcomes with residents' experiences. Matt added that future assessments will focus more on impact, case studies and resident perspectives.

- How does the assessment account for situations where residents may feel services are deteriorating despite the Council assessing performance as good or improving?

  Response: Officers advised that performance varies by service and community, with inspection findings, resident surveys and service feedback used to challenge internal views and identify where improvement is needed.

- Which objective has performed least well this year, and what lessons have been learned?

  Response: Richard advised that no single objective stood out as the poorest performer, and none had declined since the previous year. Community resilience and capacity were identified as areas for development, with the focus on continued improvement across all objectives.

- Is the self-assessment process genuinely valuable, and how can it be improved to achieve better outcomes?

  Response: Richard advised that the self-assessment's value lies in evidence gathering, challenge and reflection, helping services identify improvements and inform business planning. Future work will strengthen outcome measures, resident feedback, accessibility, case studies and lived experience evidence.

- There appears to be a risk that a gap develops between how residents see the Council and how the Council sees itself. The self-assessment rates performance as good or very good, while residents often raise concerns. How is that gap addressed? Councillors often hear when services go wrong, so the Council must test whether its self-assessment matches residents' experiences.

  Response: Richard confirmed that resident feedback and independent evidence are used to challenge internal views and provide a balanced assessment of achievements and improvement areas.

- The assessment highlights Flying Start as an important contributor to creating a fairer place to live. However, eligibility is largely determined by geography, meaning some families with significant need may not qualify while others with less need do. What can be done to encourage Welsh Government to make Flying Start more flexible and expand provision?

  Response: Will McLean (Chief Officer for Children and Young People) advised that Flying Start remains important for supporting families and early years development. As a grant-funded programme, the Council must work within Welsh Government requirements but will continue to advocate for greater reach, recognising its wider benefits for family support and early intervention. Future childcare reforms will remain an area for discussion.

- Warm spaces have been an important initiative during colder periods. Given recent extreme weather, should similar attention be given to "cool spaces" and what opportunities are there to influence Welsh Government policy in this area?

  Response: Matt advised that evidence and local data will support discussions with Welsh Government, helping make the case for changes, support programmes and future policy or funding priorities.

- The Food and Farming Strategy promotes use of local food in schools. Can the Council also strengthen links between children and food production, for example through farm visits and greater understanding of local agriculture?

Response: Craig O'Connor (Chief Officer for Place and Community Well-being) confirmed that a Food Strategy update will be considered shortly. Schools are already involved in initiatives linking pupils with local food production, supported by grant funding and ongoing work with procurement teams and partners to strengthen local food supply chains and education.

- If Welsh Government support becomes available for initiatives that connect schools and farming, how can the Council help promote and make best use of it?

  Response: Craig confirmed that officers are continuing to work through the Food Strategy programme and associated partnerships. Future updates will be provided to members through the appropriate member forums. He advised that ongoing work is focused on maximising opportunities created by new grant funding and partnership arrangements.

- The report shows that take-up of Universal Free School Meals has declined from around 75% to 68.6%, against a target of 77%. Why are fewer pupils taking up Universal Free School Meals? This reduction in take-up is quite significant and merits attention. R

  Response: Deb Hill-Howells (Chief Officer for Infrastructure) advised that the figure is an average, with take-up varying significantly between schools. Officers are focusing on the lowest-uptake schools and have gathered pupil and parent feedback. Take-up fell after summer-term menu changes, some required to meet Welsh Government healthy eating standards. Feedback has highlighted portion sizes, menu preferences and food waste. A parent survey is underway, and officers are working with catering staff to improve menus while remaining compliant.

- Why has the Council decided not to have a separate Poverty and Inequality Action Plan? How can the Council be confident that all areas identified in the Equality Impact Assessment—including care-experienced people, veterans and other protected groups—are being properly addressed?

  Response: Matt clarified that not having a separate poverty and inequality strategy does not reduce the Council's commitment. The Council works through its separately monitored Strategic Equality Plan and mainstreams poverty and inequality considerations across services, including Food and Fun, prevention work and targeted support for disadvantaged communities. He acknowledged veterans were not explicitly referenced but confirmed support remains important, noting the Council's Armed Forces Covenant commitments and Gold Award status.

- The report shows a reduction in free or subsidised play provision. What has caused this reduction and what impact is it having?

Response: Will advised that the measure relates mainly to the Food and Fun summer provision. As places are free to book, some families reserve but do not attend, making participation appear lower than expected. The programme remains available and continues to provide high-quality activities and meals during school holidays. The issue is attendance and utilisation, not reduced provision.

- The report refers to Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA), ELSA support and other interventions. Are we concentrating too much on reacting to problems rather than helping children develop resilience and coping skills before problems emerge?

  Response: Will responded that schools develop resilience, emotional wellbeing and life skills daily through the curriculum and pastoral support. ELSA and EBSA are highlighted because demand for specialist support has increased, but they sit alongside wider preventative work already embedded in mainstream teaching and wellbeing provision.

- Why is the performance measure relating to young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) highlighted as an area of concern when performance has improved?

  Response: Will confirmed that the proportion of young people who are NEET has improved since last year, but remains below target. The issue is a significant national challenge and not unique to Monmouthshire. Funding has been secured to continue targeted support, with the Inspire programme now in the core budget so support workers can work directly with young people in schools. The aim is to keep improving outcomes and reduce the number becoming NEET.

- The report presents the NEET measure as a percentage, whereas actual numbers would provide a clearer picture of the scale of the issue. Another example is the measure for care-experienced young people, which shows a target of 60% remaining in education, employment or training. What does that percentage actually represent and is that a high enough target?

  Response: Richard agreed that future reports should include actual numbers alongside percentages, noting that the 2.5% NEET rate represented around 20 young people. Jane Rodgers (Chief Officer for Social Care and Safeguarding) explained that small care-experienced cohorts mean individual changes can affect percentages significantly. The Council remains ambitious for education, employment and training outcomes, with pathway planning and personal adviser support provided to each young person.

- Are schools providing enough time and focus to resilience, mindfulness and coping skills given the pressures faced by young people today?

<u>Response</u>: Will advised that resilience, wellbeing and life skills are embedded across the Curriculum for Wales and daily school life. ELSA, EBSA and other interventions reflect rising demand for specialist support, alongside universal preventative work. Most pupils receive resilience and emotional support through mainstream teaching, with additional interventions available where needed.

- How can the Council gather more low-cost resident feedback, including through contact centre interactions, reporting systems and routine exchanges, to ensure self-assessment reflects public experience?

  <u>Response</u>: Matt agreed there are opportunities to make better use of resident feedback. The Council already uses Let's Talk Monmouthshire, the Resident Survey, service-specific feedback, social care and library surveys, and Youth Service engagement. Contact centre and customer systems could provide further insight. The key is ensuring feedback is analysed and used to improve services, inform self-assessment and keep the Council connected to residents' experiences.

- Can the Council make better use of evidence from the Climate Innovation Camp and similar engagement activities to understand young people's priorities and views?

  <u>Response</u>: Matt confirmed that engagement across the Council and with partners provides valuable evidence, including young people's voices, service-user feedback, resident surveys and community input. The challenge is capturing these lessons and using them more effectively in service planning and future self-assessments.

- There is some criticism of self-assessment centres on perceptions that the Council is "marking its own homework". Would increasing resident and service-user evidence help demonstrate that assessments are grounded in external experiences rather than solely internal judgement?

  <u>Response</u>: Matt acknowledged the importance of external challenge. Resident and service-user feedback, inspections, Panel Performance Assessments and scrutiny help test the Council's conclusions and reduce reliance on internal views.

Chair's Conclusion:

The Chair welcomed the increasing use of resident feedback and independent evidence, emphasising the need to ensure the Council's assessment of its own performance reflects residents' lived experience of services. Resident input, external assessment and scrutiny were recognised as essential to maintaining credibility. The Committee concluded that the self-assessment process should continue to develop so it is more evidence-based, transparent and reflective of residents' experiences before the report proceeds to Governance and Audit Committee and Full Council.

Points requiring a further response by the Cabinet Member:

None required.

Monmouthshire Scrutiny

Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee ~ Feedback to Cabinet of Meeting held on 9th June 2026

Report Item 5: 2025-2026 Financial Outturn Report

Key Issues raised by the Committee:

- Why are some primary schools with significant deficit balances not reducing those deficits despite recovery plans, while other schools hold healthy surpluses? Does this raise concerns about the effectiveness of the recovery plans?

  Response: Councillor Callard (Cabinet Member for Resources) advised that school deficits have been a recognised risk for several years, largely due to staffing costs. Schools with fewer pupils receive less funding but may still need similar staffing levels. Recovery plans are long-term, but it is concerning that some deficits continue to grow. Schools, governors, education and finance teams must ensure prudent spending and delivery of recovery plans.

  Will McLean (Chief Officer for Children and Young People) advised that deficits may rise short term before recovery measures take effect. ALN pressures, support costs beyond central funding, staffing volatility and exceptional long-term absences are all contributing to ongoing financial pressures in some schools.

- What are the current council tax and business rates collection rates compared with last year, and what is the outlook for next year?

  Response: Jonathan Davies (Head of Finance) advised that council tax collection remains a live financial risk in 2026–27 due to collection performance, affordability pressures, rising discounts and exemptions, and growing arrears. In 2025–26, collection performance created a pressure of about £345,000, offset by favourable movements elsewhere. Small collection rate changes can significantly affect Council finances, so recovery will be balanced with residents' cost-of-living pressures and closely monitored.

- Are any financial pressures or services currently being masked by one-off grants, reserves or other temporary funding that could create problems next year?

  Response: Councillor Callard responded that social care remains one of the Council's largest financial risks. Demand in social care can fluctuate significantly, and even small increases in high-needs cases can create substantial financial pressures. The position will continue to be monitored through in-year budget monitoring reports. This remains one of the most volatile areas of Council spending.

- Are there any emerging financial risks not fully reflected in the report that officers are concerned about?

  Response: Councillor Callard advised that social care demand remains a key emerging risk because of the potential for rapid changes in costs and demand. Jonathan added that Council tax collection remains a significant ongoing risk and is included within the live risk log.

- Given the growing demand and rising costs of the Pupil Referral Service (PRS), how much of the increase is due to worsening pupil needs versus mainstream schools being unable to cope? What is the average length of time pupils spend in the PRS before returning to mainstream education, and what are the future capacity risks?

  Response: Will advised that PRS demand has risen since the pandemic due to exclusion risks, failed specialist placements and increased anxiety, mental health and wellbeing needs. The service offers bespoke support and has improved returns to mainstream education, though some pupils stay for several years. Work continues on a sustainable financial model, with average stay data to follow.

- Is society facing a wider problem, with growing anxiety and mental health challenges among young people creating long-term risks for future generations?

  Response: Will replied that schools are investing in support such as nurture provision and ELSAs, while mainstream schools work to become more inclusive. Transitions, especially from primary to secondary, remain challenging, and anxiety and wellbeing issues affect many learners, not only those with ALN. Inclusive mainstream provision is key, but adds financial pressure.

- The report shows a £2.668 million surplus associated with the Welsh Medium School and Nursery. Is this money still available for development of the school or a future site?

  Response: Will advised that the funding was allocated to development work at Overmonnow and Usk, but site issues mean the original programme will not proceed as planned. Discussions with Welsh Government's Welsh-medium division are ongoing, and any future development would require a further capital funding bid.

- Does funding follow a pupil when they are permanently excluded and move into the Pupil Referral Service (PRS)?

  Response: Will confirmed that a proportion of the school's funding follows the pupil. The remaining Average Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) allocation for the year is transferred. However, the funding received is often much lower than the actual cost of supporting a pupil with complex needs in the PRS.

- To what extent does the favourable financial outturn depend on one-off grants, treasury gains, capital receipts and other non-recurring funding streams?

  Response: Jonathan advised that the Council still faces significant underlying pressures. One-off and unbudgeted grants, particularly from Welsh Government, helped support services and offset costs that would otherwise fall on core budgets. A precise figure is difficult to calculate because funding was spread across services, schools and corporate budgets. Continued Welsh Government engagement remains important.

- The committee needs a clearer understanding of how dependent the Council is on these non-recurring sources of funding. Can officers provide further information?

  Response: Jonathan agreed to provide further information. He confirmed the 2026–27 budget does not assume unknown future grants. Planned capital receipts are built into the medium-term financial strategy and are being reduced over time. Some grants are stable, while annual allocations create uncertainty, particularly in social care.

- The report shows an overspend on fleet maintenance and breakdown costs, while there is also underspend in the capital programme for vehicle replacement. How is this being reconciled and how will the Council break the cycle of maintaining an ageing fleet rather than replacing it?

  Response: Deb Hill-Howells (Chief Officer for Infrastructure) advised that vehicles are being replaced, with some refuse vehicles leased due to Welsh Government's 2030 ultra-low-emission expectation. Current electric refuse vehicles cannot yet meet Monmouthshire's operational needs, and low-emission options are significantly more costly. Extra costs also arise from breakdowns, accident-related hire and temporary replacements. A Fleet Management Board is reviewing costs, utilisation, fleet size and driver behaviour to improve efficiency and reduce spending.

- Is the issue with ultra-low-emission vehicles a supply problem or a capability problem?

  Response: Deb confirmed this is a capability issue, as current electric refuse vehicles lack the range needed for Monmouthshire's geography. The Council is working with Cenex to review routes and operating models for a future transition to ultra-low-emission vehicles.

- Has the Council received any indication of additional funding from the Welsh Government supplementary budget announced recently?

  Response: Councillor Callard advised that initial indications suggest that additional education maintenance funding will be available to local authorities. At the time of the meeting this appeared to be the only confirmed additional funding stream. Members would be updated if further information became available.

- Capital slippage (£45 million) appears high relative to the £32 million capital programme spend. What does capital slippage mean, why does it occur, and should the committee be concerned that projects are not being delivered as planned?

- Response: Jonathan advised that most slippage reflects rephasing of approved multi-year projects, not cancellation or lost funding. Delays arise from grant conditions, approvals, design, procurement, contractor availability and internal capacity. Funding is generally carried forward, while some schemes require further affordability and deliverability review. The 2026–27 focus will be improving delivery and profiling of major schemes.

- Why is the Council using £3.55 million of capital receipts to support revenue expenditure, and what is the rationale behind this approach?

  Response: Jonathan confirmed the funding is being used under approved capitalisation flexibility arrangements to support organisational change, service redesign and transformation. This avoids using revenue reserves, though reliance on capital receipts is being reduced as future receipts are limited. Officers view it as an important tool for delivering efficiencies while protecting reserves.

- Has the Council done enough to strengthen project management capacity to improve delivery of major capital schemes?

  Response: Jonathan advised that project delivery capacity remains an important factor in capital programme performance. The organisation is continuing to focus on strengthening delivery, improving profiling and ensuring schemes can be completed within available resources. There is a need to match ambition with realistic delivery capacity.

- Has the Council acted on previous concerns that major capital projects were not receiving sufficient dedicated project management, and could this be contributing to delays and slippage?

  Response: Deb advised that infrastructure projects, especially bridges and structures, will remain a major capital pressure. Three dedicated project managers are being recruited and are expected in post by September to oversee schemes such as Llanfoist Bridge, Old Wye Bridge and other major projects. This should reduce reliance on consultants and improve delivery, accountability, communication and reporting, with a further scrutiny update expected later in the year.

- Earlier you mentioned that reliance on capital receipts is becoming restricted in future years. What does this mean?

  Response: Jonathan advised that capital receipts are finite and forecast to reduce significantly over the medium term. As a result, support for organisational change through capitalisation is being reduced, leaving less flexibility to fund transformation and revenue-funded change. Future financial planning must reflect this reduced support.

Chair's Conclusion:

The Chair concluded that the committee had robustly scrutinised the report, welcomed the positive year-end position while focusing on school deficits, one-off funding, capital slippage, use of capital receipts and future resilience. Members were particularly concerned that school deficits had risen from around £4 million to £6.9 million and sought clarity on how far the favourable outturn relied on grants, treasury gains and capital receipts. Previous Full Council concerns about major capital project delivery and dedicated project management were noted. The Chair welcomed recruitment of dedicated project managers and stressed the need for better delivery and clearer communication with residents and businesses, acknowledging that Monmouthshire's bridges and structures will continue to pressure capital resources and project management capacity.

Points requiring a further response by the Cabinet Member:

- Requested further information on the Council's dependency on these non-recurring funding sources, noting that understanding the scale of this support is important given the uncertainty of future grant funding.

- Sought clarification on the high level of capital slippage (£45 million) compared with annual capital expenditure (£32 million), asking whether this reflected delivery issues or normal reprofiling of projects.

- Queried the rationale for using £3.55 million of capital receipts to support revenue-funded transformation and organisational change activities.

- Sought clarification on comments about the Council's diminishing pool of capital receipts and the implications for future financial resilience and transformation programmes.

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