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County Hall
Rhadyr
Usk
NP15 1GA

Monday, 21 April 2025

Notice of meeting

Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee

**Tuesday, 29th April, 2025 at 10.00 am,
Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr USK**

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.	Key Stage 4 Results To scrutinise the latest Key Stage 4 Results.	1 - 12
5.	Development of Children's Placements To update the committee at the 6-monthly stage.	13 - 20
6.	Investment and Commercial Interests Update To update the committee at the 6-monthly stage.	21 - 32
7.	Council and Cabinet Work Planner	33 - 38
8.	Performance and Overview Scrutiny Forward Work Programme	39 - 44
9.	Minutes of the previous meeting	45 - 54
10.	Next Meeting: 3rd June 2025 (Special), 10th June 2025	

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

Public 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.

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?

	<p>8. Have all relevant sustainable development, equalities and safeguarding implications</p> <p>9. been taken into consideration? For example, what are the procedures that need to be in place to protect children?</p> <p>10.</p> <p>11. How much will this cost to implement and what funding source has been identified?</p> <p>12.</p> <p>13. How will performance of the policy be measured and the impact evaluated</p>
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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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Key Stage 4 Performance Measures

Explanatory Introduction for Members

Page 1

Summary 2023 – All Wales Core Data Sets (AWCDS)

Minister's Statement [Written Statement: 14-16 curriculum offer and qualifications \(20 March 2023\)](#) and subsequent Directors Letter to Secondary Headteachers and Directors (20 March 2023) – Key messages on return to AWCDS

- Data Packs (AWCDS) (for schools and local authorities) will not contain any additional analyses or measures beyond what was included in 2019.
- Legacy threshold measures have been removed, but A*-A rates remain
- All other analyses continue, including national, local authority and 'family' comparisons.
- Data is for 2023 only, with no trend data available (with the exception of attendance) (now 2 years)
- WG have refreshed 'families' for 2023 to reflect the most up-to-date data. (and again for 2024 – but positions remain the same)
- Information is to be used for self-evaluation and school improvement purposes. It remains the statutory responsibility of individual governing bodies to hold schools to account, using a broad range of information.

Families

Schools face different challenges based on their context. The AWCDS contains comparative outcomes against similar schools – known as ‘Families’.

Families (of 9-10 schools) have been created by grouping on size and linguistic delivery and then ordering schools according to the values of an index of ‘challenge’, calculated as follows:

- **50%** x the proportion of pupils of statutory school age eligible for **Free School Meals (FSM)**
- **30%** x the proportion of pupils of statutory school age who live in an area classed as in the 20% most deprived parts of Wales using the 2019 **Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD)**
- **10%** x the proportion of pupils of statutory school age subject to an **Individual Development Plan (IDP)** or with a **statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN)**
- **10%** x the proportion of pupils of statutory school age who are either **new to the English language (or Welsh where relevant)**, at an early acquisition stage or developing competence.

A three-year average of data from PLASC 2021-2023 is used.

Code	School Name	Family	Position
6814075	Cardiff West Community High School	007	1
6814041	Willow's High School		2
6704076	Dylan Thomas Community School		3
6814076	Eastern High		4
6814607	Mary Immaculate High School		5
6804021	Llanwern High School		6
6814049	Cantonian High School		7
6635302	Christ the Word		8
6814042	Fitzalan High School		9
6814600	St. Illtud's Catholic High School		10
6744083	Ferndale Community School	008	1
6765500	Idris Davies School 3 to 18		2
6714601	St Joseph's RC School and 6th Form C.		3
6804026	Llswerry High School		4
6724071	Maesteg Comprehensive School		5
6734069	Pencoedre High School		6
6754012	PEN-Y-DRE HIGH SCHOOL		7
6715500	Ysgol Bae Baglan		8
6704043	PENTREHAFOD SCHOOL		9
6814054	Cathays High School		10
6804020	The John Frost School	009	1
6744053	Mountain Ash Comprehensive School		2
6694051	Coedcae School		3
6804025	Newport High School		4
6784000	Abersychan Comprehensive		5
6764073	HEOLDDU COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL		6
6634003	Rhyl High School		7
6755300	Blessed Carlo Acutis Catholic School		8
6704600	Bishop Vaughan School		9
6744106	Aberdare Community School		10
6814609	St Teilo's C-in-'w High School	010	1
6714064	Cefn Saeson Comprehensive School		2
6704031	Cefn Hengoed		3
6775501	Abertillery Learning Community		4
6804003	St Julian's School		5
6764093	Bedwas High School		6
6784076	Cwmbran High School		7
6745502	Ysgol Nantgwyn		8
6775401	Brynmaur Foundation School		9
6704044	BISHOP GORE SCHOOL		10
6764065	St Cenydd School	011	1
6604026	Ysgol Uwchradd Caergybi		2
6775500	Ebbw Fawr Learning Community		3
6704033	MORRISTON COMPREHENSIVE		4
6744027	Hawthorn High School		5
6704075	BIRCHGROVE		6
6745503	Tonyrefail Community School		7
6774061	Tredegar Comprehensive School		8
6715502	Ysgol Cwm Brombil		9
6654048	Rhosnesni High School		10

Code	School Name	Family	Position
6625400	Ysgol Emrys ap Iwan	012	1
6644012	Ysgol Treffynnon		2
6784072	West Monmouth School		3
6744022	The Pontypridd High School		4
6684038	Ysgol Harri Tudur / Henry Tudor School		5
6724059	Cynffig Comprehensive		6
6745501	Porth Community School		7
6724086	Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen		8
6694053	Glan-y-Mor School		9
6644022	Connah's Quay High School,		10
6654029	Grango	013	1
6684063	Milford Haven School		2
6804602	St Joseph's RC High School		3
6744081	Treorchy Comprehensive School		4
6654049	Ysgol Clywedog		5
6764046	Blackwood Comprehensive School		6
6764077	Lewis Girls' Comprehensive School		7
6644013	St. David's High School		8
6694600	St John Lloyd Catholic Comprehensive		9
6644021	Flint High School		10
6625403	Ysgol Bryn Elian	014	1
6694054	Bryngwyn School		2
6764070	St Martin's School		3
6654033	Ysgol Bryn Alyn		4
6764075	Lewis School Pengam		5
6754013	Cyfarthfa High School		6
6784051	Croesyceiliog School		7
6814051	Llanishen High School		8
6764031	Newbridge School		9
6664021	Ysgol Maesydderwen		10
6654044	Ysgol Rhiwabon	015	1
6664011	Newtown High School		2
6644600	St. Richard Gwyn Catholic High School		3
6714066	Llangatwg Community School		4
6634026	Denbigh High School		5
6744602	Cardinal Newman R.C.		6
6704063	Gowerton Comprehensive School		7
6704062	Penyrheol Comprehensive School		8
6814611	CORPUS CHRISTI CATHOLIC HIGH SC		9
6734067	St Cyres Comprehensive School		10
6734068	Whitmore High School	016	1
6784603	St. Albans R.C. High School		2
6764104	Islwyn High School		3
6724601	Archbishop McGrath Catholic High Sch		4
6714067	Dwr Y Felin Comprehensive School		5
6734612	St Richard Gwyn Catholic High School		6
6624022	Ysgol John Bright		7
6724078	Brynteg School		8
6744604	St John Baptist Clw High School		9
6815403	Whitchurch High School		10

Code	School Name	Family	Position
6634014	Prestatyn High School	017	1
6625402	Eirias High School		2
6694063	Queen Elizabeth High School		3
6754011	Afon Taf High School		4
6764068	Risca Community Comprehensive		5
6794064	King Henry VIII Comprehensive		6
6644011	Elfed High School		7
6704072	Pontarddulais Comprehensive School		8
6654603	St Joseph's Catholic and Anglican High		9
6724076	PENCOED COMPREHENSIVE		10
6814608	Bishop of Llandaff Church in Wales Hig	018	1
6714065	Cwmataw Community School		2
6664013	WELSHPOOL HIGH SCHOOL		3
6694060	Ysgol Gyfun Emlyn		4
6804059	Caerleon Comprehensive School		5
6684512	Haverfordwest High VC School		6
6624023	Ysgol Aberconwy		7
6644042	Argoed School		8
6614036	Ysgol Friars		9
6814070	Radyr Comprehensive School		10
6674047	Penglais School	019	1
6744019	Bryncelynog Comprehensive School		2
6654034	Darland High School		3
6734060	LLANTWIT MAJOR SCHOOL		4
6644000	Hawarden High School		5
6794066	Caldicot School		6
6644006	Alun School		7
6704032	OLCHFIA SCHOOL		8
6724080	PORTHCAWL COMPREHENSIVE SCHI		9
6724068	Bryntirion Comprehensive.		10
6664022	BRECON HIGH SCHOOL	020	1
6664002	LLANIDLOES HIGH SCHOOL		2
6635901	St Brigid's School		3
6744036	Y Pant Comprehensive		4
6684031	Ysgol Bro Gwaun		5
6694512	Dyffryn Taf		6
6644017	Castell Alun High School		7
6685900	Ysgol Penrhyn Dewi		8
6794065	Chepstow Comprehensive School		9
6794060	Monmouth Comprehensive School		10
6684035	Ysgol Greenhill School	021	1
6655401	THE MAELOR SCHOOL		2
6814039	CARDIFF HIGH SCHOOL		3
6664024	Crickhowell High School		4
6664023	Gwernyfed High School		5
6804030	Bassaleg School		6
6734065	COWBRIDGE COMPREHENSIVE SCHI		7
6735400	Stanwell School		8
6704069	BISHOPSTON COMPREHENSIVE		9

Headline Measures – a reminder

The 5 headline measures that the Welsh Government will publish are all “points based”

- The Capped 9 measure
- Literacy measure (best of Language / Literature)
- Numeracy measure (best of mathematics / numeracy)
- Science measure (best of science)
- Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate measure

Additional Information

- Performance measured against 5 or more A*A
- Performance gaps against by gender and eFSM/non-eFSM
- Actual results against modelled performance (set by Welsh Government)
- Individual subject performance by grade distribution (%)
- Average points score analyses against upper, middle and lower third of students

Calculating Points Values

Points values, for a 'single' qualification (some vocational have double the volume)

Page 6

GCSEs	Grade	Base Points
Level 2 Grades	A*	58
	A	52
	B	46
	C	40
Level 1 Grades	D	34
	E	28
	F	22
	G	16

Entry Level	Level	Base Points
Entry Level Pass	3	14
	2	12
	1	10

Vocational	Level	Base Points
3 Grade Scheme	Distinction	34
	Merit	28
	Pass	19

Capped 9 Explanation

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Qualification ‘Slot’	2018 Model	2019 / 2023 Model
1	Welsh Language / English Language GCSE	Literacy GCSEs: Best of English Language, Welsh First Language, English Literature or Welsh Literature
2	Mathematics GCSE	Numeracy GCSEs: Best of mathematics or numeracy
3	Mathematics – numeracy GCSE	Science GCSEs: Best of science
4	Science 1 GCSE	Best other qualifications capped at 6 GCSES or equivalent volume for vocational
5	Science 2 GCSE	
6	Best other qualifications capped at 4 GCSES or equivalent volume for vocational	
7		
8		
9		

Example A

9 A* GCSEs (9 x 58 = 522 points)

Example B

5 Cs GCSE + 2 Vocational Merits = (5 x 40 + 2 x 28) = 256



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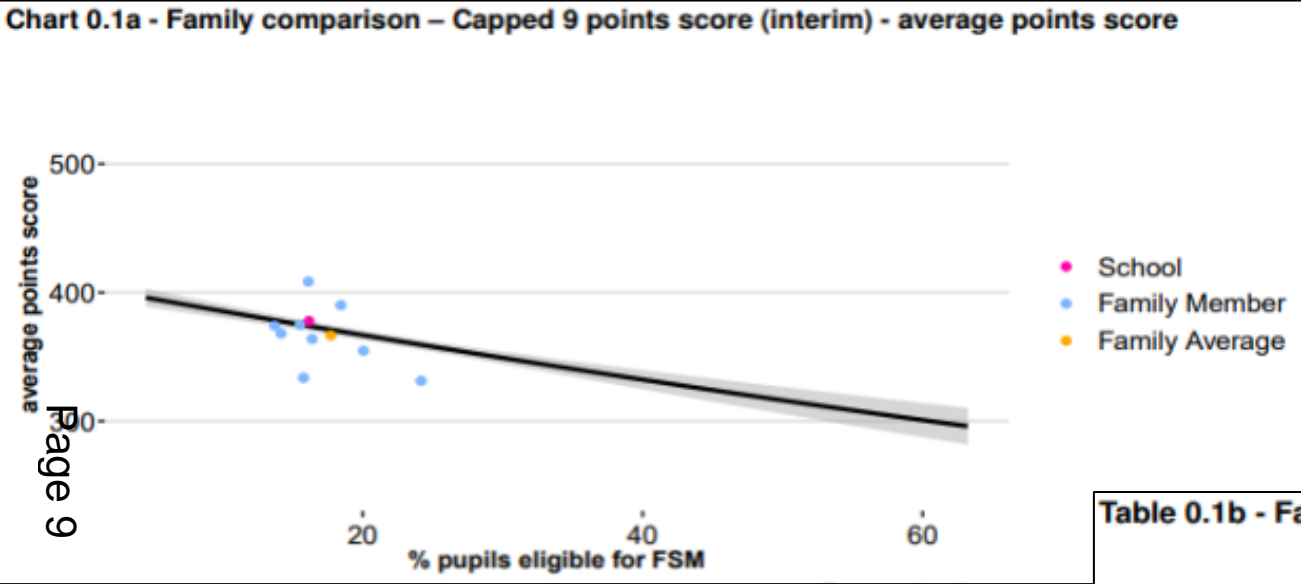
What does the data look like – key charts only

(A complete school pack is approximately 120 pages)

At school level

***All charts / tables have a 0.0x numbering system
This is used rather than page numbers***

Capped 9 Points Score (Chart 0.1a) / (Table 0.1b) Comparison Against Modelled Outcomes (by FSM)



The line represents the 2023 model of outcomes against FSM eligibility and can be used to approximate a 'benchmark comparison'. Points below the line indicate a lower than modelled performance; points above the line indicate a higher than modelled performance.

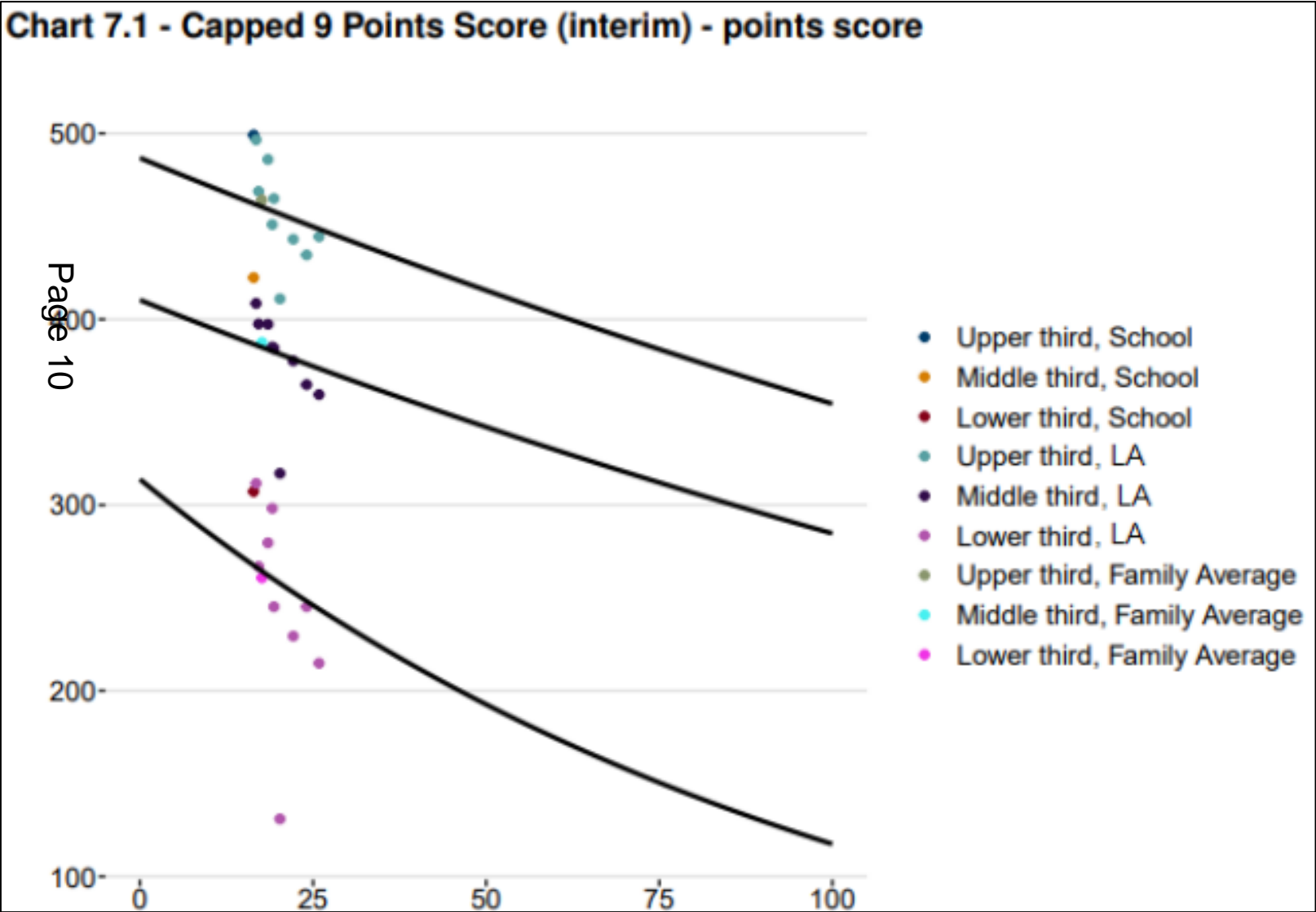
As % of eFSM increases,
'expectation' of outcomes decreases

Table 0.1b - Family comparison - Capped 9 points score (interim) - average points score

Title	Capped 9 points score (interim)	% pupils eligible for FSM
School	377.8	16.2
Family Member: 1	390.1	18.4
Family Member: 2	354.6	20.1
Family Member: 3	333.7	15.8
Family Member: 5	331.2	24.2
Family Member: 6	363.7	16.4
Family Member: 7	408.4	16.1
Family Member: 8	374.1	13.7
Family Member: 9	375.0	15.5
Family Member: 10	368.1	14.2
Family Average	366.6	17.7

Capped 9 Points Score (Chart 7.1)

Comparison Against Modelled Outcomes (by FSM)



Key chart examples –
taken from 2019 pack

Capped 9 Points Score
(by thirds)

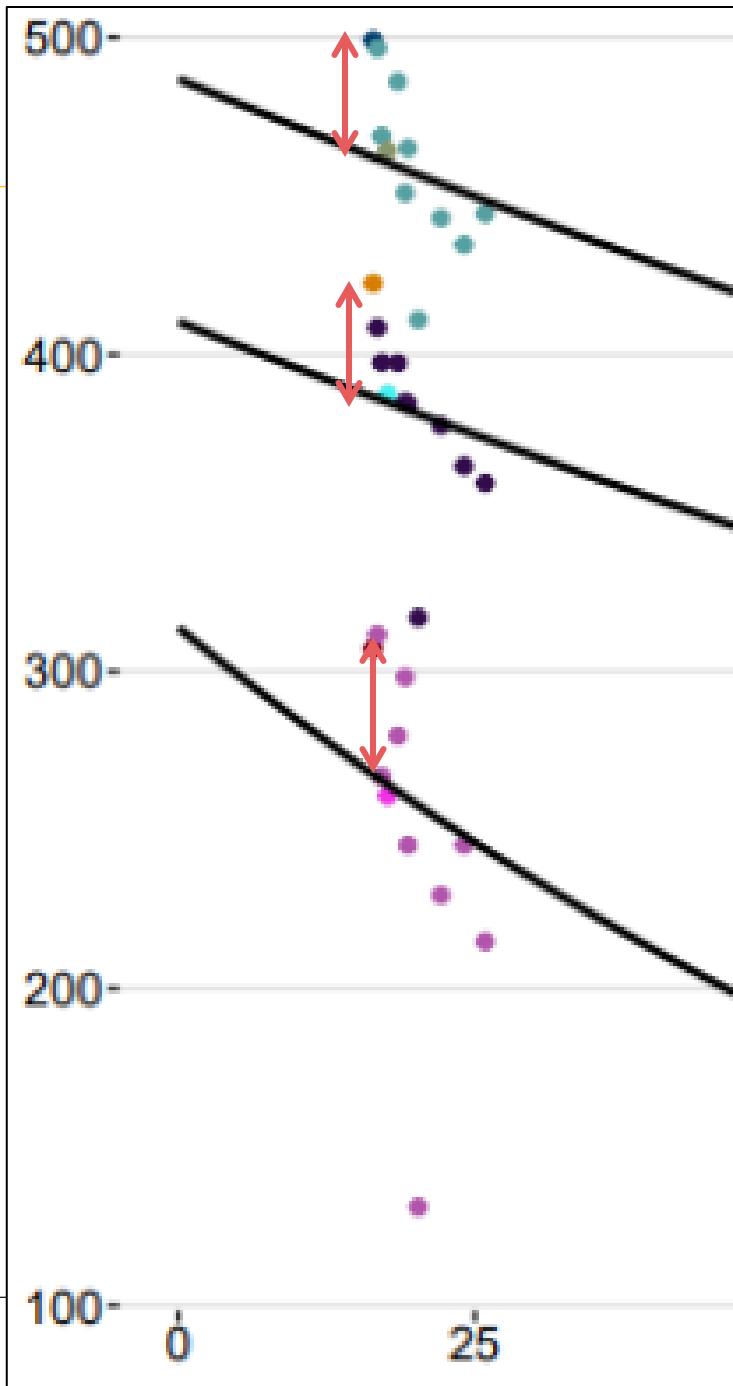
The far later in the pack
(7.1)

Previous chart enlarged
How to analyse this chart:

1. The difference (+/-) from the family
2. The difference (+/-) from the national modelled line

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- Upper third, School
- Middle third, School
- Lower third, School
- Upper third, LA
- Middle third, LA
- Lower third, LA
- Upper third, Family Average
- Middle third, Family Average
- Lower third, Family Average



By comparing actual outcomes for each third of pupils compared to modelled outcomes, you may be able to identify potential strengths or weaknesses in a particular third.

1. How does the average points score for each third of pupils compare with the modelled points score for our FSM eligibility level? If there is a notable difference, what might have caused this?
2. How does the average points score for each third of pupils compare with that for other family schools and the family average?
3. Are there any contextual factors that have affected results of a particular third of pupils?

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

MEETING: Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 29th April 2025

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 updates provided to Committee, the first of these having been presented on 8th October 2024.

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 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; however, the number of Local Authority foster carers has not increased sufficiently to meet our needs. Monmouthshire has 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 Bill which has been laid before the Senedd intends to eliminate profit from the care of children who are looked after. As it currently stands, in April 2026, it will no longer be possible in Wales to register as a 'for-profit' provider, and from April 2030 (extended from 2027) it will be illegal to make new placements for children with a 'for-profit' provider.
- 3.5 The private 'for profit' provider market has become significantly destabilised following the Welsh Government's policy direction and subsequent Bill. The destabilisation of the current 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 as at April 2024 were based on current trends and numbers of children looked after. 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 In respect of the provision of the care element for residential children's homes in the context of the eliminate agenda, 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.
- 3.10 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.
- 3.11 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.
- 3.12 Scott Hereford joined the service in August 2024 as the Residential and Resource Service Manager and is now leading on this area of work.

Residential and Supported Accommodation Developments

- 3.13 **Property 1 in Caldicot, 16+ Supported Accommodation for up to 5 young people** (Business Case Agreed by Cabinet – 22nd May 2024).
- 3.14 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.
- 3.15 The procurement process for the support element was completed and a service provider appointed on the 17th of September 2024.

- 3.16 An Open Day was carried out on the 31st of October 2024, where Children's Services teams, local councillors 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.
- 3.18 All 4 young people 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 new 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 to collectively resolve 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).
- 3.24 Property Element
This project is being delivered via a property acquisition which was completed in March 2024. Following acquisition, there was a delay in securing the correct level of technical support to underpin the tender for the works. The tender process was undertaken and a contractor appointed in October 2024, with the design and technical scrutiny and the mechanical and electrical elements approved on the 26th November 2024. Refurbishment works then commenced on 28th January 2025.
- 3.25 Since the commencement of the works, there have been areas of structural works that have required further investigation and surveys to be undertaken. Remedial work has led to further delays in the overall project being completed. The latest proposed date for the works to be completed is the 30th June 2025, although the service is pressing for this to be brought forward.
- 3.26 A project group is in place comprising Senior Managers from Children Services, Estates Department Project Manager and the contractors, which meets bi-weekly to monitor the progress and to consider the issues as they arise to minimise further delays.

Recruitment of work force.

- 3.27 A staffing structure and model of care were agreed via the Health and Social Care Directorate Management Team on 18th of December 2024. The Home Manager and Assistant Manager were subsequently appointed in March 2025 and are now in role. The recruitment of the 9 Residential Childcare Workers and 2 Night care workers began in March and is about to complete. The induction and training programme for staff has been devised and there are plans in place to implement team training in May 2025. This will provide the workforce with the skills and knowledge in readiness to welcome our first young person to the home.
- 3.28 In October 2024 we reported that we had applied for a grant to support the development of the workforce. This was not successful. We were subsequently successful in securing training support through Social Care Wales.

Registration and Matching

- 3.29 The children's home will be required to register under Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW). A registration application was submitted to CIW was submitted on 9th April 2025, alongside the application to register Service Manager Scott Hereford as Responsible Individual for the home.
- 3.30 Care planning meetings have been ongoing with the Social Worker teams to match 4 children currently in "For Profit" out of county residential placements. Transition planning has begun for these children with careful consideration of the potential for a change in service opening date.
- 3.31 An initial neighbourhood engagement event was held on the 06/06/24 where over 30 residents attended to speak with the project team, the Cabinet Member and the local ward Councillor. Since then, the team has continued to issue newsletters and has held 2 further in person meetings with direct neighbours.

Project Costs

- 3.32 The cost of the acquisition together with the Land Transaction Fee and other associated costs totalling £875,000 were met via a successful HCF capital grant. An additional £300,000 is allocated to the costs of the refurbishment. Currently the costs of the remedial structural works that are required is being assessed so that a Notification of Event application can be made for any additional costs incurred. If this is not successful, these costs will be borne by Children's Services.
- 3.33 The expected service commencement date is now set for end of June / early July 2025, which is 9 months beyond the original date put forward within the business case. The main factors for slippage against the original timelines include:- delay in securing initial technical support; contractor delay in commencing the works; unexpected additional works required. The delay will have an impact on the in-year savings programme and on the care planning for individual children; however, both elements are now factored into overall service and placement planning.
- 3.34 **Property 2 in Caldicot, a registered residential children's home for 4 children** in partnership with Pobl Housing Association, using an existing Pobl property. (Business Case Agreed by Cabinet 17th July 2024.)
- 3.35 Since the update in October 2024, a feasibility assessment has been undertaken by Pobl which confirmed the commitment to develop the property into a 4 bedded residential home for children in partnership with Monmouthshire. Architectural designs/plans for the development and layout for the home have been agreed and signed off. The tender process for the refurbishment works is currently being developed by Pobl with the aim to appoint an approved contractor in July 2025. Pobl have also had confirmation that the scheme was granted a certificate of lawfulness and that a full change of use planning application is not required.
- 3.36 Pobl Management have met with the Regional Partnership Board to discuss the outcome of the feasibility assessment and are preparing to submit an IRCF (Integrated Regional Capital Fund) grant application by the end of April 2025. Capital costs will fall to Pobl who will then lease the property to the service. Provision was made within the business case to accommodate the cost of the lease.

- 3.37 Target completion date was originally proposed as August 2025; however, it is clear that this is not feasible and a target completion date is now set for the Dec 2025. Whilst we are working closely with Pobl and exerting influence around our desire to expedite completion, the timelines are for Pobl to determine. As we move closer to completion a neighbourhood engagement event will be arranged.
- 3.38 It is anticipated that the service delivery model will be through an in-house residential workforce, which will be recruited to in due course alongside an application to register under Care Inspectorate Wales.
- 3.39 **Property in Abergavenny, 16+ Supported Accommodation for up to 5 care experienced young people** (business case agreed by cabinet in 22nd January 2025).
- 3.40 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.
- 3.41 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. A further HCF grant application has provisionally been approved by Welsh Government to cover the refurbishment works (estimated £540,000). Notification of whether the grant application is approved will be received once full refurbishment costs have been identified.
- 3.42 The next steps for the project are to establish project plans and drawing up Bill of Quantities and Schedule of Works so that tender documentation can be prepared for framework contractors. It is intended that the service delivery model will be via a third party provider, as is the case in the Caldicot scheme. The target date to conclude the tender process and appoint a service provider is November 2025.
- 3.43 An indicative date for the commencement of the service has been identified for Jan 2026
- 3.44 **Therapeutic Children's Home Abergavenny**
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. The home currently provides a placement for 1 child. In January 2025 minor building work was completed to allow for the placement of a 2nd child and the matching process has commenced.
- 3.45 **Therapeutic Children's Care Home, South**
This property currently provides 1 placement (managed by ABuHB). The expectation is that the property will become available within the next 3 – 6 months. A review of the property is scheduled for May 2025 via Children's Services and the Estates Team so that consideration can be given as to what changes will be required to develop a 2-bed bespoke children's home.

Ongoing Property Searches and Predicted Demand

- 3.46 Children Services have continued to search for appropriate properties for one further Pre-16 residential children's home, particularly in the North of the Local Authority area. It has been challenging to locate a suitable 4/5-bedroom property in the North due to factors such as cost, condition of the building, registration requirements and community facilities. Children Services continue to review the demand of placements against the work undertaken by the service in line with their Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy and Placement Commissioning Strategy.
- 3.47 The number of children looked after is continuing to show a gradual decline; however, due to the demand and complexity of presenting issues there is a need to continue to plan ahead to ensure that we have sufficient appropriate and available placements for our looked after population. Children Services continue to plan for each child and a "horizon" list is kept to identify children who

may need, at some point, to be accommodated. Predicting demand, however, remains a challenging and dynamic process, complicated by uncertainty within the care market nationwide

4. **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. **OPTION APPRAISAL**

N/A

6. **EVALUATION CRITERIA**

6.1 Currently there are 3 main projects under development with 1 further project having been successfully completed.

6.2 **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 required				
Monmouth	Residential	4	LA Owned, Care Delivered by LA	Target June 2025 (slipped by 9 months)
Caldicot Property 2	Residential	4	RSL owned, Care Delivered by LA	Target Dec 2025 (slipped by 4 months)
4 more placements required. One further property to be sourced, ideally in the North of the county				

16+ Supported Accommodation originally 20 places required (reduced to 15 due to subsequent increase in UASC provision)				
Caldicot Property 1	16+ supported accommodation	5	LA Owned and 3 rd sector delivery	Completed Nov 24

Abergavenny	16+ supported accommodation	5	LA Owned and 3rd sector delivery	Target Jan 2026
5 more placements potentially required				

Therapeutic Residential Children's Homes 6 places required				
Existing provision (South)	Therapeutic Residential	Currently 1 Potentially 2	LA Owned Can be developed into a 2-bed provision	No target completion date identified
Existing provision (North)	Therapeutic Residential	Currently 1 Potentially 2	RSL owned and 3rd sector delivery	Target for 2 nd placement Jun 2025
2 more placements potentially required				

7. 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 impact on savings mandates for the service in light of project slippage is being monitored, alongside of ongoing care planning and placement development 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. CONSULTEES

Children Service Leadership Team

Nick Keyes, Head of Estates

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

10. BACKGROUND Papers

Developing Children's Residential and 16+ Supported Accommodation Placements Report

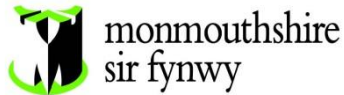
18th April 2024

Development of Children's Placement Policy 8th October 2024

11. 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 2025

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 24-25 was £3.871m.
- 3.5 Since acquisition, both acquired investments have generated a combined net income of £2,216,948. This position will improve as a consequence of the net surplus forecast for 25-26, as outlined in the subsequent sections of the report.

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 6 monthly 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 23/24 (March 2024)	-3.74%	0.15%	
ROI as of Sept 2024	-2.08%	1.41%	
ROI as of March 2025	-1.81%	1.44%	
ROI forecast at 25-26 (March 2026)	-1.00%	2.04%	
Occupancy rates as of March 2024	85.6%	97%	
Occupancy rates as of Sept 2024	87.9%	94.6%	
Occupancy rates as of March 2025	87.7%	97.1%	
Net income to MCC 24/25	-£111,348	£285,222	£173,874
Net income to MCC since acquisition	£242,088	£1,974,860	£2,216,948

- 3.9 Since acquisition, both assets have generated a total income of £2,216,948 above borrowing repayments. Whilst both assets currently perform below the original 2% above borrowing investment criteria the borrowing costs 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. Feasibility work is being undertaken to explore any opportunity to expand the MonSpace availability at the property. Newport Leisure Park continues to generate a net return to MCC. 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.
- 3.11 The 25/26 forecast is reflective of existing lettings and therefore presumes no further lettings or surrenders will be realised. Newport Leisure Park will exceed the 2% ROI target following expiry of existing rent-free periods later in 2025/26. In order to return Castlegate Business Park to 2% Return on Investment, 10% of the total floor area (equating to 18,188 sqft) will need to be let. This equates to 95.8% occupied.

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.

3.13 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. As of March 2025, the occupancy rates are at 87.7%.

3.14 Details of letting activity since September 2024 are set out below:

Office & MonSpace

3.15 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.



3.16 As of March 2025, 7 of the 9 suites are occupied to a range of businesses including accountancy firms, mortgage brokers and gate manufacturers. One of the two remaining vacant suites is under offer. The letting of MonSpace has generated a total rental to MCC of over £61,000 pa.

3.17 Following an initial period of occupation, one of the MonSpace lettings has agreed to enter longer term agreements at the property. This has further reduced MCC's service charge, business rates and utilities liability.

3.18 Despite additional units being let, the overall rent roll has remained consistent following the surrender of Unit 540 by an existing tenant who sought to downsize and relocate within the premises. Unit 540 is being advertised and expressions of interest have been received from MonSpace occupants. The rent roll has also been adjusted following departure of the film production company who occupied for a short period during 2024.

3.19 In addition to the above, a rent review is being exercised with an existing tenant, with a significant rental uplift achieved as well as extension of their existing lease agreement. A new renewal is under negotiations for unit 610, 960 and 940 which will secure the future of an existing tenant and result in a rental uplift. A license has also been granted for occupation of a small storage area, thereby further increasing the rent roll and reducing MCC's service charge and business rates liability.

- 3.20 The onsite café operator (Castell Coffi) continues to trade well and a lease extension is under negotiation. The granting of the lease would result in a rental uplift to MCC. 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.
- 3.21 Since the last performance update, a tenant has been evicted following a sustained period of failed payment and arrears. One other flexi unit occupier has vacated, which has resulted in a small change in occupancy rates. This has resulted in a small reduction in the ROI compared to 24/25 projections, however rental arrears are being recovered. Expressions of interest have been received in the vacant space. The short-term letting resulted in a business rates saving to MCC.
- 3.22 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.
- 3.23 There is one tenant at Castlegate Business Park in arrears and discussions are ongoing regarding payment plans to address short-term cash flow pressures. Business rates mitigation is also being explored for all vacant floor space within the property. We are currently awaiting confirmation from the Shared Revenue Services regarding the status of any outstanding rates bills for Castlegate or refunds for occupied space. Any additional rates may have a material impact on the figures and business rates consultants are supporting any potential mitigating action should it be required.
- 3.24 In order to maximise use of the asset and unlock revenue saving opportunities for MCC, opportunities to relocate services storage requirements are being explored. MCC's Museum Service will vacate an existing hired industrial unit in Severnbridge Industrial Estate, therefore generating additional revenue savings to the property on business rates and unlocking an underutilized unit to be re-let. There is strong demand in the industrial unit. The total revenue benefit as a result of this relocation is projected to be around £30,000. We are also exploring opportunities to collaborate with Coleg Gwent for the hire of space within the property.
- 3.25 As a consequence of existing tenant expansion and securing new occupiers within the MonSpace initiative, 32 new skilled jobs have been created. Over 300 staff are now employed within the property.
- 3.26 As of March 2025, Castlegate Business Park is projected to generate a commercial loss of £111,348. Whilst a continued financial pressure, this is a £17,057 improvement on the reported position as of September 24. Castlegate Business Park has only two tenants who are able to exercise a break clause within the next calendar year. Both tenants are in negotiations to

accept a lease renewal, with terms agreed with the larger of the occupiers including occupying additional vacant space. Neither tenant has served the required notice to vacate. We continue to secure new tenants to return the asset to a net positive position.

Newport Leisure Park

- 3.27 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.
- 3.28 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 1.44%. New tenants have been secured following the lettings of Unit 7 (Starbucks) and Unit 2 (Innoflate). Both tenants are trading and paying rental and service charge contributions. There is one remaining vacant unit at the property.
- 3.29 Details of letting and management activity from September 2024 are set out below:
- 3.30 Unit 6, previously occupied by Pizza Hut, has been let to Horizon Vets Ltd. The veterinarians are undertaking fit out of the unit and are scheduled to commence trading in April 2025. Letting of the unit is on competitive terms and consistent with pre-pandemic rental levels. The business rates and utility costs associated with the vacant property have been reflected in the slight reduction on ROI.
- 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. The property has been marketed since for an alternative occupier. Limited interest has been received to date, with interested parties seeking creation of a drive through window which is currently unfeasible due to access constraints. Consideration is being given to partitioning the unit into two smaller units to increase the attractiveness to smaller leisure offerings.
- 3.32 One of the units is subject to a rent review which is currently being negotiated. A marginal rental uplift is anticipated.
- 3.33 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 for a period of 3 years. The reduced rental value is reflected in the financial projections in Figure 1. Cineworld continue to meet their revised lease obligations.

- 3.34 MCC have agreed terms with an EV charging company who will hire car parking spaces from MCC for the provision of EV charging. A grid application has been made to the National Grid and we await confirmation of planning permission. Should consent be granted, MCC will benefit from a fixed annual rental and profit share that will improve the financial projections outlined in the report.
- 3.35 MCC are in negotiation with an advertising board company (Route Media) who are shortly to apply for planning permission. If consent is granted and subject to contract, this will further enhance the rental income from the asset.
- 3.36 There are no tenants in arrears at Newport Leisure Park. The earliest break clause of relevance to Newport Leisure Park cannot be exercised until November 2025. No notice has been served or any intention shared of a desire to vacate.

Commercial and Other Investment Portfolio's

- 3.37 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 100% let and there are rental arrears in the region of £33k, around £20k of which is within a month of the due date. This equates to less than 10% of the rent roll. Lease renewal negotiations are ongoing with an existing longstanding business, who is seeking to expand their offering within the Old Pill Farm Industrial Estate.
- 3.38 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. The space was used recently for the Monmouth Placemaking consultation event. Change of Use application has been submitted to planning for the former planning offices at Market Hall for the use of a gallery, workshop and event space. Terms have been agreed for a new lease subject to planning approval. Enquiries are being made with potential co-working operators to facilitate hire of the space. These uses will generate a rental for MCC and offset ongoing revenue costs for the respective properties.
- 3.39 The ground floor of Innovation House, Magor has recently been reoccupied in part by MCC's Social Care Workforce Development Team which has enabled previously leased in premises to be released, resulting in a £25k pa revenue saving. The second-floor smaller wing is occupied and generating a rental return. The remaining vacant space continues to be marketed. Recent interest has been received from an engineering firm and terms are being discussed. The Pupil Referral Service have vacated Hanbury House in Chepstow,

following relocation to the former Mouton House School, which provides an opportunity to re-let as commercial premises.

- 3.40 There are 24 farm holdings in the Council's ownership generating an improving commercial return. There are £40k of arrears for County farms, primarily relating to one farm in Leechpool. Two agricultural cottages have been identified as surplus and are under consideration for disposal. A new letting has completed at Llanfair Farm in February following a successful marketing campaign. An agreement has been reached in the succession case at 4 Llandewi Court Farm with terms agreed for a new FBT at the property. Forfeiture notices have been served on one Council farm for non-payment of rent and we will be seeking vacant possession via a Court Order. 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.
- 3.41 Income from the Council's solar farm is currently forecasted to generate a net income (after operating, maintenance and borrowing costs) of £285,916, an overspend of £116,084 against an £402,000 income target. This is mainly due to a number of grid outages onsite plus scheduled replacement of inverters resulting in downtime. Adverse weather conditions have contributed to the reduced income return. It is anticipated the performance will improve through 2025/26, with a forecasted gross income of £751,286. Since 2017, the solar farm has generated a gross income for MCC of £5,186,879 and a ROI of approximately 5%.

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.

4. REASONS:

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

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

This report outlines a £374,861 improvement in the performance of the investment portfolio from 24/25 projections. The 25/26 projections have been adjusted to reflect the changes and risk associated with Cineworld's occupation. Despite these changes, both Castlegate Business Park and Newport Leisure Park are projected to generate a significant improvement

since 23/24 and Newport Leisure Park a net surplus, after borrowing repayments, in 24/25.

£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	781,353	925,523	144,170	1,013,517	1,071,250	57,733	1,794,870	1,996,773	201,903
Income	-682,400	-814,175	-131,775	-1,359,825	-1,356,472	3,353	-2,042,225	-2,170,647	-128,422
Net	98,953	111,348	12,395	-346,308	-285,222	61,086	-247,355	-173,874	73,481

As a result of the investments, budgeted income targets have been introduced. The latest forecast at period 3 of 2024/25 shows a net surplus generated on NLP of £285,222 and a deficit of £111,348 on Castlegate, a combined surplus on both investments of £173,874. This results in an in-year forecast budget pressure of £73,481 against the income target of £247,355.

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. Since September 2024, 32 new skilled jobs have been created or appointed to at Castlegate Business Park.

The capital values of both assets continue to be impacted by the respective sectors however an improving rent roll is resulting in capital appreciation. Both assets will be revalued in accordance with MCC's programme of annual asset valuations.

Income targets for the commercial and other investment asset portfolio, exclusive of acquired investments, have been increased by £100,000 in 24-25. The finalised figures for the 2024–2025 financial year will be presented within the budget outturn report. We are currently awaiting confirmation from the Shared Revenue Services regarding the outstanding rates bill for Castlegate, which may have a material impact on the figures.

6. 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.

7. CONSULTEES:

Stacey Jones – Finance and Resources Manager
Joanne Chase – Head of Commercial Law

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Appendix 1 – Performance Dashboard

9. AUTHOR(S):

Nicholas Keyse – Acting Head of Landlord Services

10. CONTACT DETAILS:

Tel: 01633 644773

Email: nicholaskeyse@monmouthshire.gov.uk

Appendix 1 – Performance Dashboard

Performance Indicators			
Measures/Milestones	24/25 M6	24/25 Budget	24/25 Outturn Forecast
Total Gross income target for investment and commercial portfolio	£3,641,133	£3,756,652	£3,871,507
Industrial Unit Gross Income	£209,451	£223,275	£233,876
County Farm Gross Income	£270,294	£284,120	£274,012
Solar Farm Gross Income	£627,535	£727,032	£650,151
Retail and Office Gross Income	£482,681	£480,000	£662,296
% of rental arrears from commercial portfolio total income	2.4%	2%	4%
Castlegate Business Park Occupancy Rates	87.9%	100%	87.7%
Newport Leisure Park Occupancy Rates	94.6%	100%	97.1%
Gross income on acquired investments	£2,051,172	n/a	£2,051,172
Castlegate Business Park – Job creation from lettings or existing tenants	275 employed (33 new roles)	n/a	307 employed (32 new roles)

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Committee / Decision Maker	Meeting date / Decision due	Report Title	Cabinet member	Purpose	Author	Date item added to the planner
Council	15th May 2025	SAC Membership Report	Martyn Groucutt - Education	To inform Council of SAC recommendations to appoint members of SAC	Sharon Randall-Smith	16-Apr-25
Council	01-Jul-25	RLDP for Adoption	Paul Griffiths - Sustainable Economy	To adopt the RLDP following receipt of the Inspector's report, making it the County's Development Plan as defined by S38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004	Mark Hand / Rachel Lewis	23-Aug-22
Council	26-Jun-25	Licensing Act Policy 2025	Angela Sandles - Engagement	Policy has to be approved by Full Council and it needs to be in place by 1 st July 2025	Linda O Gorman	10-Jan-25
Cabinet	25-Jun-25	Play Sufficient Assessment	Angela Sandles - Engagement Play sufficiency assessment update.			Nick John 28-Mar-25
Cabinet	25-Jun-25	Shire Hall Delivery Stage - Financial Approval	Ben Callard - Resources		Tracey Thomas	25-Mar-25
Cabinet	21-May-25	Active Gwent Sports Partnership	Angela Sandles - Engagement For Monmouthshire County Council to formally enter into the Active Gwent sport partnership.			Nick John 28-Mar-25
Cabinet	21-May-25	Review of Monmouth Cluster and proposed statutory consultation	Martyn Groucutt - Education		Matt Jones	3-Mar-25
Cabinet	21-May-25	Y Prentis Update	Paul Griffiths - Sustainable Economy		Hannah Jones	26-Feb-25
Cabinet	05-May-25	Pavement Café Policy	Paul Griffiths - Sustainable Economy	To adopt the pavement café policy as the basis for making decisions on applications for licences	Mark Hand / Paul Keeble	4-Oct-22
Cabinet	05-May-25	Digital, Data and Technology Collaboration	Mary Ann Brocklesby - Whole Authority Strategy	To develop proposals to build on existing collaborative arrangements in place for the provision of technology services through the Shared Resource Service. Expanding on these to include digital and data services will generate	Peter Davies & Matt Gatehouse & Sian Hayward	14-Mar-25

Council	10-Apr-25	Constitution Review	Angela Sandles - Engagement		James Williams	25-Mar-25
Council	10-Apr-25	Senior Pay Review	Ben Callard - Resources		Julie Anthony	3-Mar-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	09-Apr-25	Welsh Church Fund Working Group - meeting 4	Ben Callard - Resources			
Cabinet	02-Apr-25	Marches Forward Partnership	Mary Ann Brocklesby - Whole Authority Strategy		Peter Davies - Lead (Cath Fallon)	3-Mar-25
Cabinet	02-Apr-25	Reponse to Boundary Commission Electoral Review Consultation	Angela Sandles - Engagement		John Pearson	12-Feb-25
ICMD	26-Mar-25	Proposal to increase the fee payments to Monmouthshire Foster Carers	Ian Chandler - Social Care & Safeguarding		Charlotte Drury	4-Feb-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

Council	06-Mar-25	Publication of the Councils Pay Policy	Ben Callard - Resources	To approve the publication of Monmouthshire County Council's Pay Policy, in compliance with the Localism Act.	Matt Gatehouse / Pip Green	17-Jan-25
Council	06-Mar-25	Contract Procedure Rules	Ben Callard - Resources		Scott James	9-Jan-25
Council	06-Mar-25	2025/26 Final Budget sign off including CT resolution	Ben Callard - Resources		Jon Davies	13-Jun-24
Council	06-Mar-25	2025/26 Capital Strategy & Treasury Strategy	Ben Callard - Resources		Jon Davies	13-Jun-24
Cabinet	05-Mar-25	Approval of a Discretionary Policy for Council Tax Premiums	Ben Callard - Resources		Ruth Donovan	27-Jan-25
Cabinet	05-Mar-25	2025/26 Final Revenue and Capital Budget Proposals	Ben Callard - Resources		Jon Davies	4-Jun-24
Cabinet	05-Mar-25	2025/26 WCF/Mon Farm Strategy	Ben Callard - Resources		Jon Davies	4-Jun-24
ICMD	26-Feb-25	County of Sanctuary: Homes for Ukraine	Angela Sandles - Engagement	To confirm future support arrangements for Ukrainian's living in Monmouthshire as part of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme following changes to the national arrangement for both funding & visas	Richard Drinkwater/Matt Gatehouse	7-Feb-25
ICMD	26-Feb-25	Housing Allocations Policy				
Cabinet	19-Feb-25	2024/25 Revenue and Capital Monitoring Month 9	Ben Callard - Resources		Jon Davies	4-Jun-24

Cabinet	19-Feb-25	UK Shared Prosperity Fund post March 2025 – financial implications and impact	Paul Griffiths - Sustainable Economy		Hannah Jones	10-Jul-24
ICMD	29-Jan-25	2025/26 Community Council and Police Precepts final	Ben Callard - Resources		Jon Davies	17-Dec-24
Council	23-Jan-25	Council Diary 2025/26	Angela Sandles - Engagement		John Pearson	
Council	23-Jan-25	GWENT REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP BOARD (RPB) AREA PLAN AND RPB ANNUAL REPORT 23/24	Ian Chandler - Social Care & Safeguarding		Natasha Harris (Torfaen)	
Council	23-Jan-25	Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2025/26	Ben Callard - Resources		Jon Davies	13-Jun-24
Cabinet	22-Jan-25	Business case for the purchase of a property in Abergavenny to develop supported accommodation for care experienced young people	Ben Callard - Resources		Jane Rogers	7-Jan-25
Cabinet	22-Jan-25	2025/26 Draft Revenue and Capital Budget Proposals	Ben Callard - Resources		Jon Davies	4-Jun-24
Cabinet	22-Jan-25	Education Middle Tier	Martyn Groucutt - Education		Will McLean	20-Nov-24
ICMD	15-Jan-25	Decision to transfer Dixton Archive from Monmouth Museum to Herefordshire Record Office			Rachael Rogers	9-Dec-24
ICMD	15-Jan-25	Welsh Church Fund Working Group - meeting 3	Ben Callard - Resources		Dave Jarrett	13-Jun-24

ICMD	18-Dec-24	2025/26 Community Council and Police Precepts draft	Ben Callard - Resources		Jon Davies	13-Jun-24

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Monmouthshire's Scrutiny Forward Work Programme 2024-25

Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee (Meetings at 10am unless stated otherwise)				
Meeting Date	Subject	Purpose of Scrutiny	Responsibility	Type of Scrutiny
29 th April 2025	Key Stage 4 results	To scrutinise the latest Key Stage 4 results.	Will McLean Ed Pryce (EAS) Alexis Edwards (EAS, PSIP) Cllr Groucott	Performance Monitoring
	Development of Children's Placements	To update the committee at the 6-monthly stage.	Jane Rodgers Diane Corrister Cllr Chandler	Policy Review/ Development
	Investment and Commercial Interests Update	To update the committee at the 6-monthly stage.	Peter Davies Nick Keyse Stacey Jones Cllr Callard	Performance Reporting
SPECIAL 21 st May or 3 rd June	Shire Hall Financial Update	To scrutinise progress of the National Lottery Heritage Fund development phase.	Tracey Thomas Cllr Sandles	Policy Development
	Alternative Learning Provision / Specialist Resource Bases	Follow up from May 24 report: Scrutiny of MCC Alternative Learning Provision / Specialist Resource Bases.	Morwenna Wagstaff Will McLean Cllr Groucott	Performance Reporting
10 th June 2025	Revenue & Capital MTFP update and process	To review the budgetary situation.	Jonathan Davies Peter Davies Cllr Callard	Performance Reporting
	Welsh Language Annual Report 24-25	To scrutinise the Council's performance.	Nia Roberts Pennie Walker Cllr Sandles	Performance Monitoring

Monmouthshire's Scrutiny Forward Work Programme 2024-25

Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee (Meetings at 10am unless stated otherwise)				
Meeting Date	Subject	Purpose of Scrutiny	Responsibility	Type of Scrutiny
	Public Protection?*			
15th July 2025	Revenue & Capital monitoring outturn	To scrutinise the budgetary position (revenue and capital) for services falling within the committee's remit, including an early update on 2025/26.	Jonathan Davies Peter Davies Cllr Callard	Performance Reporting
	Enabling Strategies (including Procurement)	To include Procurement, Digital and Data, Asset Management, Finance and People. (Audit Wales work)	Richard Jones Hannah Carter	Performance Reporting
	Self-Assessment 24/25	To scrutinise the self-assessment and identify areas for further scrutiny.	Richard Jones Hannah Carter	Performance Reporting
	Public Protection Performance 24/25*	<i>To review the performance of the service area.</i>	<i>Huw Owen Alun Thomas Cllr Sandles</i>	<i>Performance Monitoring</i>
23rd September 2025	Revenue Monitoring Update 1	To scrutinise the revenue position for services falling within the committee's remit.	Jonathan Davies Peter Davies Cllr Callard	Performance Reporting
	Chief Officer for Social Care AMR	To scrutinise the progress and strategic direction for the service area.	Jane Rodgers Jenny Jenkins Cllr Chandler	Performance Reporting
	Safeguarding Annual Report	To scrutinise the performance of safeguarding arrangements.	Jane Rodgers Diane Corrister Cllr Chandler	Performance Reporting

Monmouthshire's Scrutiny Forward Work Programme 2024-25

Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee (Meetings at 10am unless stated otherwise)				
Meeting Date	Subject	Purpose of Scrutiny	Responsibility	Type of Scrutiny
18 th November 2025	Revenue & Capital Monitoring Update 2	To scrutinise the budgetary position (revenue and capital) for services falling within the committee's remit.	Jonathan Davies Peter Davies Cllr Callard	Performance Reporting
	Complaints Process	To scrutinise the performance of the Council's complaints process, and issues raised by it.	Annette Evans Cllr Sandles	Performance Monitoring
Dec or Jan Special for extra items?*				
10 th February 2026	Draft Revenue & Capital budget proposals	To scrutinise the 2025/26 Draft Revenue and Capital Budget Proposals.	Jonathan Davies Peter Davies Cllr Callard	Performance Reporting
	Revenue & Capital Monitoring Update 3	To scrutinise the budgetary position (revenue and capital) for services falling within the committee's remit.	Jonathan Davies Peter Davies Cllr Callard	Performance Reporting
10 th March 2026				
21 st April 2026				
To be confirmed	Grants item – Joint with People?	To scrutinise the Council's use of grant money.	Jonathan Davies Hannah Jones	Performance Monitoring
To be confirmed – Members' Seminar?	Social Care – prevention and resilience	To explore if more can be done to build prevention and resilience re: life expectancy vs. healthy life expectancy	Jane Rodgers Nicola Needle Jenny Jenkins Cllr Chandler	Policy Review/ Development

Monmouthshire's Scrutiny Forward Work Programme 2024-25

Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee (Meetings at 10am unless stated otherwise)				
Meeting Date	Subject	Purpose of Scrutiny	Responsibility	Type of Scrutiny
To be confirmed (18/06/24)	Registration Services Annual Report 24/25	To review the performance of the service area.	Jennifer Walton Cllr Sandles	Performance Monitoring
To be confirmed (15/10/24 – covered by Audit Wales item in July?)	Socially Responsible Procurement strategy	To review progress of the strategy.	Gemma Ellis Scott James John Paxton Cath Fallon Cllr Brocklesby	Performance Monitoring
To be confirmed (15/10/24)	WESP (Welsh in Education Strategic Plan)	To scrutinise performance against the plans.	Sharon Randall Smith Will McLean Cllr Groucott	Performance Monitoring
To be confirmed (19/11/24)	Planning Annual Performance Report	Scrutiny of the annual performance report prior to submission to Welsh Government.	Philip Thomas Craig O'Connor Cllr Griffiths	Performance Monitoring
To be confirmed (15/10/24, Cabinet Nov 24 – 10th March 26?)	NEET Reduction Strategy	To scrutinise the strategy's performance.	Hannah Jones Louise Wilce Cllr Griffiths	Performance Monitoring
To be confirmed	Recruitment and retention	<i>Effect on the Council's performance and ability to deliver.</i>		
To be confirmed	Use of Reserves	<i>Future proofing and resilience planning as well as supporting long-term strategic priorities.</i>	Peter Davies Jonathan Davies Cllr Callard	

Monmouthshire's Scrutiny Forward Work Programme 2024-25

Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee (Meetings at 10am unless stated otherwise)				
Meeting Date	Subject	Purpose of Scrutiny	Responsibility	Type of Scrutiny
Corporate and Community Plan Items for the Committee's consideration for inclusion into the P&O Scrutiny Forward Plan:				
Social Justice Strategy progress				
Business Monmouthshire Project monitoring				
'Learning led' review of educational provision in Chepstow				
Review of Property Assets				

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Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, County Hall, Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA with remote attendance on Tuesday, 11th February, 2025 at 10.00 am

Councillors Present

County Councillor Alistair Neill (Chair)

County Councillors: Rachel Buckler, Steven Garratt, Meirion Howells, M. Newell, Paul Pavia, Peter Strong, Su McConnel

Also in attendance County Councillors: Ann Webb, Ben Callard and Ian Chandler

Officers in Attendance

Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer
Peter Davies, Acting Chief Executive
Will McLean, Chief Officer for Children and Young People
Jane Rodgers, Chief Officer for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health
Matthew Gatehouse, Chief Officer People, Performance and Partnerships.
Jonathan Davies, Head of Finance
Ian Saunders, Chief Officer Customer, Culture and Wellbeing.
Craig O'Connor, Chief Officer, Place
Deb Hill-Howells, Head of Decarbonisation, Transport and Support Services
Dave Loder, Finance Manager
Stacey Jones, Senior Accountant
Nikki Wellington, Finance Manager
Tyrone Stokes, Accountant

APOLOGIES: Councillors Jill Bond and John Crook

1. Apologies for Absence

Jill Bond. John Crook, with Su McConnell as substitute.

2. Declarations of Interest

None.

3. Public Open Forum

None.

4. Revenue and Capital Budget Proposals - To scrutinise the 2025/26 Draft Revenue and Capital Budget Proposals

Cabinet Member Ben Callard delivered a presentation, introduced the report and answered the members' questions with Matthew Gatehouse, Jonathan Davies, Ian Saunders, Cabinet Member Ian Chandler, Jane Rodgers and Will McLean.

- *Are there any other frontline services being considered for curtailing or closure, especially in light of the proposed changes to Monmouth Library?* There are no proposals to move Monmouth Library or close any hubs. The proposal is to adjust the hub's opening hours to generate revenue savings while minimizing disruption to services.
- *How do you expect to fill the gap in the budget, considering the expected additional funding from the Welsh Government?* The budget gap is expected to be partially filled by additional funding from the Welsh Government. However, there is ongoing negotiation, and the final budget will reflect any changes. The council is optimistic that the funding will cover a significant portion of the remaining gap.
- *Are there going to be redundancies, especially in frontline services like teaching staff, given the budget pressures?* While the council has been managing vacancies to minimise the need for redundancies, it cannot be explicitly stated that there will be no redundancies. The number of potential redundancies is expected to be very low, and efforts are being made to manage this through natural turnover.
- *Are there any effects on teaching staff due to the education budget pressures, such as reductions in foreign language offerings in the sixth form?* The council is fully funding the Teachers' pay award, pension costs, National Insurance contributions, and adding an additional £1m to support schools. Decisions on staffing within schools are made by individual governing bodies, so specific impacts on teaching staff cannot be detailed at this time.
- *Why is there uncertainty about the impact of National Insurance changes on indirect employees in social care?* The uncertainty arises because the impact on commissioned services depends on how much of the increased National Insurance contributions will be passed on to the council by service providers. This varies based on the providers' business models, size, and structure. The council has modelled a pressure for this but will need to consider the risk as part of the final budget.
- *Are we in a position to give some an approximate figure as to how many hours in total we might need to reduce the hub opening hours?* The proposal is to reduce hub opening hours by approximately 35 hours per week across the four hubs. This equates to roughly one day of provision per week.
- *There will be a £2.9 million shortfall in the budget. What happens if we don't get the grant from the Welsh Government, and what will that mean for our residents and their Council tax bills? Are there criteria that we need to meet to get these extra grants?* Negotiations with the Welsh Government are ongoing, and the council is optimistic about a positive outcome. If the grant from the Welsh Government does not fully cover the shortfall, the council will look at other income streams, including additional grant income. The eligibility for these grants is not dependent on having a funding gap. The council is not expecting to

increase Council tax further to close the gap, but it cannot be completely ruled out.

- *If we were to get the full £2.9m that we need, could we still utilise those extra income streams?* Yes, the council can still apply for and utilise additional grants regardless of whether the full funding gap is closed by the Welsh Government grant. The eligibility for these grants is not dependent on the funding gap.
- *Will the £300k investment in the foster care service be a direct payment to the families as an increase to what's already paid to them on a weekly or monthly basis? Will the investment see savings in payments to foster care agencies with successful recruitment, and what would those savings be per individual in the difference between annual cost of an agency and a foster family?* The investment will be used to increase both the allowances and fees paid to foster carers. The fees could be doubled in some cases. This increase aims to make the payments comparable to those from independent agencies, leading to potential savings as more foster carers are recruited directly by the council. The exact savings will depend on the number of foster carers transitioning from agencies to the council.
- *Do we have an update on how successful the budget consultation has been so far, and can councillors do more to promote it? How will the feedback influence the final budget proposals?* The budget consultation has been going well with good engagement. Councillors can help promote the consultation by sharing information and encouraging participation. The feedback from the consultation will be considered in finalising the budget proposals.
- *Is it correct that there is no Cabinet Member attendance at engagement sessions?* The engagement sessions are being conducted as drop-in sessions across various council hubs, lasting for several hours each. These sessions are primarily led by officers who have the necessary information to answer residents' questions. If officers are unable to provide answers, they will take contact details and follow up. Unfortunately, the cabinet member isn't able to attend all sessions due to a busy schedule filled with budget consultation events and other commitments.
- *How do we focus on prevention and demand management in our budget, and what are we doing to invest in early intervention to stem the demand for our services?* The council is working on a project to develop a whole authority approach to prevention, aligning various services to focus on promoting independence, well-being, and community connections. This includes tackling inequality, increasing spending on frailty, and transitioning to reablement in social care. Although there is no specific budget line for prevention, it is a thread running through various activities.
- *How do we ensure value for money in our commissioning and procurement processes, especially for services provided to schools?* Schools are encouraged to bring forward contractors to be added to the approved contractors list to improve value for money. Schools can also obtain multiple quotations for work

and present them for approval. The council supports schools in managing these processes, although it acknowledges the challenges schools face in doing so.

- *With nearly 70% of our schools in deficit, what are we doing to ensure their financial sustainability?* We acknowledge the concerning situation with nearly 70% of schools in deficit. The authority is working with schools to support them with their budgets and provide advice on becoming more financially sustainable. As part of the budget, an additional £1m is being allocated to support schools, although it is recognised that this will not eliminate their deficits overnight. Some schools will need to make changes to achieve financial sustainability. It is also important to build bridges between schools to share best practices, which is an ongoing effort within the education portfolio.
- *What is the plan to deal with the significant number of surplus places across school clusters?* The issue of surplus places is under constant review, with some areas in Monmouthshire experiencing more acute problems than others. Proposals are being developed to address these issues, but it is not a quick fix. The consultation processes required for any changes are lengthy, and none of the schools are eligible for a speedy closure route from the Welsh government, meaning they would all undergo the full consultation process. A longer-term strategy involves increasing the number of younger people in the authority by providing affordable housing for younger families. This is expected to bolster school populations and have positive outcomes for communities.
- *Are difficult decisions regarding the school estate and asset base, as well as changes to leadership structures, such as the Federation of schools, being considered to deal with these problems?* It is important to recognise the different types of schools in the community, including religious and community schools, and how they operate under different legal frameworks. Moving forward, there will be a need to look at the leadership structures of schools. There are already two federations in Monmouthshire, which have proven to be positive developments by supporting smaller schools and providing access to more improvement resources and varied experiences for children. It is vital that we try to attract the best headteachers to Monmouthshire. Other local authorities in Gwent have larger primary schools, which correlate with higher salaries and attract a different group of headteachers and applicants. This is something that will be considered moving forward, with the aim of addressing these issues in the coming year.
- *Has any thought been given to looking at the model used in the Savoy in Monmouth, where a trust runs it successfully, for the Borough Theatre?* The Borough Theatre has previously explored a trust model, which had relative success for a period but ultimately did not work. The current model involves strong partnerships, including with the Town Council, and there are no immediate plans to change this. However, future exploration of different operating models is possible.
- *What plans are there for increasing income in leisure centres, and has there been any thought given to introducing family memberships?* The council is

confident in the growth of income from leisure centres and is always looking at new options. The idea of a family membership is a good suggestion and will be explored further. The leisure centres have seen significant growth in income recently, and various membership options are already in place.

- *Residents are facing a 23% increase over three years, which is significantly higher than inflation. How will the council respond to residents who are concerned about this increase and how it aligns with the council's claim of being financially responsible?* Most of the cost pressure is due to increasing demand and complexity of services. The council emphasises the importance of protecting valuable public services and question would be which services residents would prefer to see reduced if the council tax increase were to be lowered? Funding primarily comes from taxpayers' money, and the council is making £5.1 million worth of changes, including efficiency savings and income increases, to balance the budget. We would underscore the council's commitment to maintaining essential services that residents rely on, despite the challenging decision to raise council tax.
- *The council has a track record of not meeting its savings targets, which raises doubts about the credibility of projecting significant savings in the coming year. What reassurance can be given to residents that the financial plan is based on solid foundations?* This is a valid concern. In the 2024-25 financial year, about 80% of the projected savings were realised, leaving a shortfall in the budget. This year, the council aims to make £5m worth of savings. There is a challenging financial situation faced by local authorities and Monmouthshire has managed well under pressure in recent years. The council uses the best available data to forecast demand for the following financial year, although there have been overspends, particularly in social care and health. These overspends have been offset by better outcomes in other areas. While there is always risk, the council aims to balance the budget by the end of the year, even though exact figures may not be met. The goal is to get as close as possible with the available forecasting.
- *How is the business community supported, and has any consideration been given to engaging with business leaders to explore ways to manage and reduce costs within the council, given that business leaders are experienced in managing costs?* The council frequently engages with the business community through the Chambers of Commerce, which are part of the budget consultation process. The council aims to hear their voices and support them with policies. Additionally, the council uses the private sector to deliver services, contracting out to private organisations. While some private organisations provide good value for money, others do not, leading to proposals in the budget to bring services back in-house to provide better service and value for money.
- *Is the increasing trend in the needs of older adults within the county a straight line upwards, or is there any sign of it levelling off or accelerating?* The trend in the needs of older adults within the county is difficult to predict precisely. While there has been a steady increase, particularly after the pandemic, there are variations in specific areas. For example, there has been a rapid rise in the highest level of need around residential care homes, while care at home hours

have stabilised. Overall, the trend is expected to continue increasing due to the ageing population, but it is not a straightforward linear increase.

Chair's Summary:

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

5. Financial Update 3 - To scrutinise the budgetary position (revenue and capital) for services falling within the committee's remit

Cabinet Member Ben Callard introduced the report and answered the members' questions with Jonathan Davies, Deb Hill-Howells, Cabinet Member Ian Chandler, Jane Rodgers and Will McLean.

- *Can the savings made through vacancies in civic enforcement be offset against the income that those officers would have generated?* Officers clarified that the savings listed for Civic Enforcement officers are made through vacancies and do take into account the potential impact on income generated from fines. The service has considered the overall impact, including the enforcement action and income generation, when holding these vacancies.
- *What is the cause of the overspend in waste and grounds maintenance, particularly related to recyclable prices and workplace recycling regulations, and how can we encourage a higher recycling rate in the county?* Members were advised that the overspend is due to volatility in recyclable prices and the impact of new workplace recycling regulations. These regulations have led to reduced volumes of recyclable materials collected from businesses, as some businesses have found alternative waste disposal options. This has affected the overall recycling rates and contributed to the overspend. The council is reviewing the costs associated with trade waste and recyclable materials and are in the process of going through a procurement exercise to address the volatility in recyclable prices and improve the financial situation for the next financial year. Additionally, efforts are being made to encourage businesses to participate in recycling programs and comply with the new regulations to maintain high recycling rates.
- *How confident is the council in addressing the budget shortfall of £1.593m, that includes a £2.376 million shortfall in meeting savings targets relating to only 78% of the £10.9 million of savings forecast to be achieved?* The Cabinet Member advised that the council is confident in addressing the shortfall by continuing to work with services to drive through the remaining savings towards the end of the year and maintaining a focus on budget control to ensure that costs are managed effectively, and the remaining gap is closed.
- *What are the recovery plans for schools ending the financial year in deficit, given that 69% of the schools (24 out of 35) are forecasted to end the financial year in a deficit?* The Chief Officer for Children and Young People responded that the council is working with schools to support them in developing effective recovery plans, which includes providing guidance and assistance in managing their

budgets, exploring opportunities for efficiency savings, and ensuring that schools have the necessary resources to address their financial challenges.

- *Has there been a shift in children's social care, with providers exiting the market, reducing the number of providers offering services and affecting costs?* The Chief Officer for Social Care and Health agreed there has been a shift, which has led to increased costs due to reduced competition. The market is currently volatile, with some providers charging higher prices during this transition period, so the council is working to increase in-house care provision to mitigate these costs.
- *Are discussions taking place across the region with other local authorities to take collective action to resolve the issue of continuing healthcare (CHC) cost shunting from the NHS to local authorities?* The Committee was advised that conversations are being held, but that progress has been slow, and the process remains challenging, with Councils seeking ways to resolve the issue collectively.
- *How is the £400k shortfall in housing and homelessness savings targets being addressed, and what is the impact of grant funding on the shortfall?* The shortfall has been addressed through grant funding from Welsh Government which has significantly mitigated the situation and that the council is continuing to work on reducing high-cost bed and breakfast placements by utilizing more cost-effective temporary accommodation solutions. Whilst this is a positive outcome, the timely delivery of savings plans is important and in this instance could have led to grant funding being redirected to other priorities.
- *How is the council tackling the growing trend of increased discounts, exemptions, and slower tax collection, and has there been an impact on the council's income?* The Committee was advised that the level of discounts and exemptions is increasing, moving towards an all-Wales average and that the council has been raising awareness about available discounts and exemptions to ensure eligible residents take advantage of them. Whilst the collection rate remains robust, the process is taking longer, and the council is working closely with the shared service with Torfaen to offer support to those experiencing difficulty in paying.
- *What is the council doing to build up its reserves, and how can it work with the Welsh Government to ensure Monmouthshire is not in the position of having the least reserves?* The Cabinet Member assured that the council is aware of its low level of reserves and is taking steps to increase financial resilience, which includes the council tax premium to create resilience and investment in housing issues. He advised that increasing reserve cover depends on the funding settlement and the ability to generate a budget surplus and that the council is working closely with Welsh Government to address this issue.
- *Why are the specific forecast deficits for King Henry School and Chepstow School so much higher than for Monmouth Comprehensive?* The Chief Officer for Children and Young People confirmed that the higher forecast deficits for King Henry School and Chepstow School are due to specific challenges, including transitional costs for King Henry and other unique issues for Chepstow and that

Monmouth Comprehensive does not face the same level of challenges. He explained that the three schools have broadly similar in-year overspend positions, all in excess of half a million pounds. Monmouth Comprehensive had secured a higher level of brought forward balance, which has impacted their carried forward deficit. Chepstow School has been working closely with the council to improve their long-term deficit position, showing recent improvements. King Henry School has faced significant cost pressures due to the transition to a through school and delayed move into the new building, along with some income streams not materialising as expected. The council is working with these schools to ensure a recovery that does not immediately and detrimentally affect academic or support provision.

- *How does the deficit in schools' reserves affect the council's balance sheet, considering the uncertain time frame for recovery?* The explanation given was that the deficit in schools' reserves moves to the council's balance sheet, impacting the overall financial position and resilience. The recovery plans for schools are long-term, and therefore deficits may grow before they start to reduce.
- *The 3 core services of the council are forecast to overspend at year-end by £5.15 million. Last quarter the forecast was £5.3 million. This is marginal improvement, and quite a different picture from the overall council forecast overspend, as the 3 core services overspend continues to be offset by balancing finance and treasury measures. The overspend in those core services will now carry forward to next year – surely this is not sustainable?* The Cabinet Member responded that it isn't a negative to find ways to balance expenditure across the departments and that the council's budget proposals for next year include ongoing changes aimed at making services, particularly in social care, more financially sustainable. He explained that despite the forecasted overspend in the three core services, the council has faced significant budget gaps of over £20 million annually for the past three years, which is a substantial challenge and that he was proud of the council's efforts to address the financial pressures. The council is working to manage costs efficiently by addressing demand within services, implementing preventative measures, and ensuring financial discipline, the focus being on maintaining service quality while managing financial pressures. He also advised that the council had benefited from an additional £1.3 million Welsh Government grant.

Chair's Summary:

The Chair thanked the officers and Cabinet Member for the report and their responses to the committee's questions and said that the committee wished to recognise the work undertaken across the organisation to deliver services in a challenging financial context.

6. Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme and Action List

Due to the timing of reports coming forward, it was agreed that the next meeting in March will be cancelled, unless there is any change by the end of the week.

There is an all-Wales piece of work that Audit Wales are progressing involving local audit reviews of commissioning in all 22 local authorities – the committee's wish to scrutinise the council's Procurement can do so through the lens of this work. The committee will be updated as this work progresses.

7. Council and Cabinet Work Planner

8. To confirm the following minutes:

- Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee dated 19th November 2024.
- Special Meeting – Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee dated 3rd December 2024.

The minutes were agreed.

9. Next Meeting: Tuesday 11th March 2025 at 10.00am.

This meeting will be cancelled.

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