

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

**Meeting of People Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr USK
on Tuesday, 17th June, 2025 at 10.00 am**

Councillors Present

County Councillor Jackie Strong, (Chair)
County Councillor Sue Riley, (Vice Chair)

County Councillors: Jan Butler,
Christopher Edwards, Simon Howarth,
Penny Jones, Maureen Powell, Jill Bond
substituting for Martyn Groucutt and Peter Strong
substituting for Maria Stevens

Officers in Attendance

Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer
Rebecca Hall, Play Development Lead
Jenny Jenkins, Head of Adult Services
Nick John, Business Manager
Mike Moran, Community Infrastructure Coordinator
Leanne Watkins, Integrated Service Manager
Bethan Hopkins

APOLOGIES: County Councillors Maria Stevens and Martyn Groucutt

1. Election of Chair.

Councillor Strong was nominated by Councillor Powell, seconded by Councillor Bond.
There were no other nominations. Councillor Strong was elected.

2. Appointment of Vice Chair.

Councillor Riley was nominated by Councillor Bond, seconded by Councillor Edwards.
There were no other nominations. Councillor Riley was appointed.

3. Apologies for Absence.

Councillor Groucutt offered his apologies and was substituted by Councillor Bond.
Apologies were also received from Councillor Stevens, who was being substituted by
Councillor Peter Strong.

4. Declarations of Interest.

Councillor Jones declared a non-prejudicial interest in Item 6 as an independent
member of Aneurin Bevan University Health Board.

Councillor Butler and Councillor Bond declared non-prejudicial interests in Item 6 as
they sit on Llais Cymru.

5. Public Open Forum.

None present.

6. Audit Wales Report on Hospital Discharge (Gwent Wide) - Audit Wales to present its findings of the inspection report on hospital discharges in Gwent.

Bethan Hopkins and Leanne Watkins introduced the report and presented their key findings of the audit. Jenny Jenkins delivered a presentation and together, they answered the members' questions:

Key Questions from Members:

- Councillor Bond expressed frustration that the information she reviewed was outdated and that the updated information presented during the meeting was not shared beforehand, limiting her ability to scrutinise effectively. She requested that updated information be shared upfront in future meetings to allow for proper scrutiny.

Jenny acknowledged the importance of sharing updated information and agreed to circulate the data. She emphasised that the main theme was the improvement in the length of stay despite the constant number of delays. Action: Jenny Jenkins.

- Councillor Bond asked how the risk appetite has changed and whether there are still issues with resources despite the improvements made.

Bethan explained that risk aversion was a common theme in acute settings, with clinicians often trying to get patients to a higher standard before discharge. Leanne added that communication and education are key to reducing risk aversion.

Jenny confirmed that there are ongoing issues with resources and capacity, impacting performance, and that prioritization and allocation of cases are used to manage these challenges.

- Councillor Edwards asked if any data is kept on discharged patients in the weeks after leaving hospital and if this impacts their need to return for medical treatment.

Leanne explained that data on readmissions is kept by secondary care, and if a patient returns, they review what went wrong and how to fix it.

- Councillor Edwards enquired whether the discharge period starts again if a patient moves to another hospital within the Aneurin Bevan structure.

Jenny clarified that the length of stay does not start again when a patient moves; it is continuous regardless of hospital moves.

- Councillor Edwards asked about the unplanned absence rates in exhibit 5 and why no data has been available since June 2023.

Jenny mentioned that they are working to minimize unplanned absences with HR support and regular reports to managers. Bethan added that the lack of data since June 2023 is due to Welsh government not publishing it.

- Councillor Edwards questioned why Monmouthshire's figure for social care assessments was so high and if best practices from Caerphilly were shared.

Jenny noted that Monmouthshire has done a lot of work to reduce social care assessment figures and has worked with Caerphilly to embed best practices, particularly in developing their reablement service.

- Councillor Riley acknowledged the limitations of the data validation approach and expressed concern about people escaping the data.

Jenny acknowledged the challenges of the data validation approach and the need to manage it effectively.

- Councillor Riley asked how the need for family agreement sits or conflicts with people deemed to have capacity, noting the absence of best interest assessments can be daunting for those with lasting power of attorney (LPA).

Jenny explained that family dynamics and individual circumstances require management, and families often need time to get their heads around decisions. Leanne supported this by noting the challenges faced on the ward.

- Councillor Riley questioned whether self-funding leads to smoother transitions for patients.

Jenny clarified that self-funding does not necessarily facilitate quicker transfers, as it involves finding appropriate placements and negotiating with care homes.

- Councillor Riley enquired if care workers are now working their full contracted hours, as there were concerns about this not recovering since COVID.

Jenny confirmed that care workers in work are working their full contracted hours.

- Councillor Butler asked for clarification on acronyms. She expressed concern about the need for multiple computer systems and asked if there is any work being done to standardize them, and if Monmouthshire has a role in this.

Leanne explained the challenges of using multiple computer systems and mentioned that it has been flagged as a concern. Jenny added that previous attempts to integrate systems faced technical and legal issues, and Monmouthshire is working regionally to develop standardization with a new system called Mosaic. Bethan Hopkins commented on the challenges of integrating IT systems for health and social care, noting that this is a national issue, not just specific to the region. She emphasised the need for a sophisticated, integrated IT system that allows health and social care to share information seamlessly. Bethan acknowledged the practical challenges faced by staff, such as using multiple screens and logins, and highlighted the importance of recognising these barriers in the report.

- Councillor Butler asked for clarification on the significance of the cost of domiciliary care being capped at £100.

Jenny Jenkins explained that the maximum charge for domiciliary care is £100 per week following the completion of a financial assessment. This simplifies the financial assessment process for domiciliary care, as it does not require consideration of capital assets, unlike the more complex financial assessments needed for residential placements.

- Councillor Howarth questioned why it took nine months for the audit report to be scrutinised.

Bethan explained that the delay in scrutinising the report was due to the extensive coordination required for a regional report, which had to go through the Regional Partnership Board structures.

- Councillor Howarth enquired about the health boards' operations from Friday to Monday and how this impacts discharges.

Bethan noted that the issue of weekend discharges is a national challenge, with operational patterns affecting the discharge process.

- Councillor Howarth asked about the effectiveness of the £15 million grant from the Welsh Government intended to improve discharge operations.
- *Bethan and Jenny clarified that the £15 million grant was intended to address operational challenges, but specific details were not provided.*

- Councillor Howarth expressed a desire to review the 2024-2025 data in detail rather than being presented with it during the meeting.
- *Jenny acknowledged the desire to review the 2024-2025 data in detail and noted that the average number of delays remains constant, but the length of stay has improved. Bethan clarified that the review undertaken was part of the Welsh Government's six goals program, specifically focusing on goals five and six, which pertain to discharge planning and urgent care flow. She noted that prevention and early intervention, covered under goals one and two, were not included in this particular review. Bethan mentioned that these areas would be addressed in separate pieces of work.*
- Councillor Howarth asked if Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) handles discharges when there are complications with care plans and funding.

Jenny and Leanne discussed the handling of complex care discharges, noting that continuing healthcare assessments are being managed within primary care to improve the process.

- In highlighted the increasing budget demands for health and social care due to the aging population in Monmouthshire, Councillor Howarth questioned the impact of critical care units and patient transfers on the connectivity and coordination of care.

Jenny highlighted the strategic focus on early intervention and prevention to address the increasing demands due to the aging population.

Leanne addressed the impact of critical care units and patient transfers, acknowledging the challenges and the need for better coordination.

- **Councillor** Powell asked if providing better pay and facilities for local carers would help in recruiting more community carers.

Jenny acknowledged that while better pay might encourage more people to join the workforce, Monmouthshire is already paying some of the highest rates for domiciliary care. She also emphasised the importance of providing good training and offering long-term contracts to domiciliary care agencies to ensure workforce stability and investment.

Chair's Summary:

The Chair thanked Bethan from Audit Wales for her time in attending to present and answer questions and thanked officers for their hard work in supporting staff to provide the best quality of care for our residents.

7. Play Sufficiency Assessment Report - To conduct pre-decision scrutiny of the report.

Rebecca Hall introduced the report and delivered a presentation before answering questions, together with Mike Moran:

Key Questions for Members:

- Councillor Butler asked if there could be some organised play days in the park during the summer holidays, as currently, there is plenty of unorganised play but no organised activities.

Becky responded that while they are aware of the need for more play provisions in rural areas, the ability to offer outreach play opportunities is dependent on funding and staffing levels. She offered to set up a meeting with local councillors and the Community Council to discuss potential opportunities.

- Councillor Howarth expressed concern about the lack of facilities for children to play sports during the winter in rural areas, specifically mentioning the need for 3G or 4G playing areas. He emphasised the importance of listening to children about what they want for play facilities, rather than deciding for them. He highlighted the success of the play facilities in Gilwern, noting that it was based on what the children wanted, and stressed the importance of consulting directly with children in other areas. He mentioned the need for long-term vision and provision behind successful play schemes to ensure sustainability.

Becky agreed with Councillor Howarth's emphasis on children's voices being central to planning play provisions. She mentioned that during their consultations, a high percentage of children expressed a preference for playing outside. She assured that children's voices are considered in planning supervised play provisions and open spaces.

- Councillor Riley asked if the consultation with children for the Play Sufficiency Assessment (PSA) had been completed or if it was ongoing through the summer. She commented on the Welsh Government's parental questionnaire, noting that some questions were poorly worded and emphasised the need for age-appropriate consultations with children.

Becky clarified that the consultation for the PSA had been completed, as it was necessary to complete the PSA this year. However, she mentioned that there would be further consultation with children over the summer for planning spaces and parks.

Becky acknowledged the importance of age-appropriate consultations and assured that children's voices are central to planning play provisions.

- Councillor Edwards expressed concern about the accessibility of summer play provisions for children in rural wards, noting that parents have to travel to take their children to these schemes. He mentioned the improvements made by the Community Nature Spaces project in his ward but noted that the play equipment in the area was still lacking. He saw this as a missed opportunity to complete the scheme and asked about funding for improving or renovating these play areas.

Becky acknowledged the concern about rural play provisions and mentioned that they are continuously monitored. She noted that funding and workforce availability are key factors in determining the extent of outreach and play opportunities provided.

Mike Moran explained that the play value assessments looked at the range of activities available rather than the quality of the equipment. He mentioned that funding for play area improvements typically comes from section 106 funding, occasional Welsh Government capital funding, and working with local groups. He noted that the play areas in Councillor Edwards's ward, such as the Danes and Bayfield, are still considered play areas and have been enhanced with Community Nature Spaces.

Mike also mentioned the importance of prioritising larger play areas (neeps and leaps) to offer better play value and suggested that smaller play areas with low play value might be converted into something different in the future. He acknowledged the need to cater to older children (10-12 years old) and mentioned that some new play areas are designed to accommodate this age group.

Mike confirmed that the play area in the centre of Councillor Edwards's ward is still considered both a community nature space and a children's play area.

- The Chair, Councillor Jackie Strong, asked several questions on behalf of Councillor Bond. She asked what the criteria is for the tables in the PSA report? She highlighted that some 'ambers' have actions, whilst some don't. Could 'not applicable' be relevant? She noted that some ambers don't relate or link to the action list (on page 188). She commented that some gaps are missed in the actions list.

Becky explained that the RAG rating (Red, Amber, Green) is based on whether the criteria are fully met (green), have areas for improvement (amber), or need significant improvement (red). She noted that some ambers might not have actions if they are not achievable within the three-year timeframe. Non-applicable (n/a)

was used for new criteria introduced this year that couldn't be compared to previous assessments.

- Councillor Strong challenged the assessment of Longfellow decaying play area. She asked whether if the park couldn't secure this funding, where would the only park in West End, Caldicot, get funding? She commented that it would be unlikely to secure funding through placemaking, as it's not in scope and there isn't Section 106 due to no building. Given there is deprivation, she asked when this area would receive help?

Becky mentioned that the play areas would be reassessed, and future plans would be made based on these assessments.

Mike acknowledged that Longfellow Road play area needs upgrading and explained that funding typically comes from section 106, Welsh Government grants, or working with local groups. He mentioned that the location of Longfellow Road play area might also be a factor to consider for its improvement.

- Councillor Strong asked how play value is calculated and scrutinised/checked for consistency?

Mike offered to circulate the assessment form used to evaluate play value scores and mentioned that they plan to reassess play areas to get updated assessments.

- The Chair, Councillor Jackie Strong asked a question on behalf of Councillor Penny Jones. She asked whether LAPs (Local Areas for Play) considered to be as important as NEAPs (Neighbourhood Equipped Areas for Play) as they provide play areas for those in less populated areas such as villages, thus providing social interaction for children and families?

Mike explained that LAPs on their own do not provide much play value for many villages. He suggested that for larger villages, the aim should be to have at least one NEAP, which offers more play value for a wider range of children. He acknowledged the mixed bag of play area provisions across the county and mentioned that a piece of work could be done to bring focus to this issue.

- Councillor Peter Strong mentioned the idea of taking out small play areas with virtually no play value, which he referred to as "106 play areas." He suggested that a more flexible approach might be appropriate, considering the changing demographics of areas.

Mike explained that the play value assessment did not necessarily look at the quality of equipment but rather the range of activities children could participate in.

He mentioned that the majority of play areas were ranked as poor initially, but improvements have been made. He suggested that for larger villages, the aim should be to have at least one NEAP.

Becky agreed with the importance of children's voices in planning play provisions and mentioned that children's preferences for playing outside were considered in the PSA. She emphasized that children's voices are central to planning supervised play provisions and open spaces.

- Councillor Peter Strong stressed the importance of self-help groups and community councils in maintaining play areas, citing an example from his ward where parents approached the council to clean up and paint a play area, and MCC provided support.

Becky acknowledged the importance of community engagement and offered to set up a meeting with local councillors and community councils to discuss play provisions.

- Councillor Peter Strong noted the importance of community councils in responding to changing situations and mentioned that they can often find small pots of money to add to play area improvements. He pointed out a blank space under Community Focused Schools in the PSA report and suggested that the idea of Community Focused Schools might be something for scrutiny committees to pick up at a later stage.

Mike acknowledged the importance of community councils and self-help groups in maintaining play areas and mentioned that MCC often finds small pots of money to add to play area improvements.

Becky confirmed that there is ongoing work with the Community Focused Schools officer, Lisa Grant, who is a big advocate for play. She mentioned that Lisa Grant sits on the play strategy group and that there is good communication between them. Becky offered to double-check the blank space in the report and provide more information.

- Councillor Jackie Strong commented on the importance of considering the needs and aspirations of girls. She highlighted that girls use parks and open spaces differently than boys, especially during adolescence, and may not access these spaces due to factors like fear of crime. She emphasised the need to ensure that girls' voices are heard and their needs are met, suggesting that features like curved benches for socialising could be beneficial. She also mentioned the importance of organised play and social clubs for young girls and women, noting their impact on well-being in later years.

- Councillor Howarth raised his concern about the timing and effectiveness of capital grants for play areas. He questioned how much time is given to communities to decide on their needs and the support they receive. He emphasised the importance of conducting a full survey of everyone in the community before deciding to remove a play area. He expressed unease about the proposals and stressed the need to engage with children of all age groups to ensure their needs are met. He also mentioned that areas should not be left wild and overgrown if play areas are removed.
- Councillor Jackie Strong asked for clarification on the blank space under Community Focused Schools on page 65 of the report. She noted that there was a brief comment later, but nothing in the main box. She suggested that the whole idea of Community Focused Schools might be something that one of the scrutiny committees should pick up at a later stage in its forward work programme.

Mike responded by acknowledging the importance of Community Focused Schools and mentioned that there is ongoing work and good communication between the play team and the Community Focused Schools officer, Lisa Grant. He noted that Lisa is a strong advocate for play and that there are joint efforts to develop play opportunities in schools. Mike also mentioned that he would double-check the report to ensure nothing was missed.

Chair's Summary:

The Chair thanked the officers for their hard work and concluded that the Committee endorsed the report.

8. People Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme.

The Committee agreed to split the July items by holding a Special meeting – 16th July was agreed in addition to 22nd. The Scrutiny Manager raised the report 'County of Sanctuary' which was detailed in the Cabinet and Council Forward Planner and the Committee agreed that they would like to scrutinise it in advance of Cabinet's consideration of the report.

9. Council and Cabinet Work Planner.

Councillor Bond's request about an additional column to highlight the implications for service users to help scrutiny in considering the priority of adding it to any future work programme was noted.

Members agreed to add County of Sanctuary to the Special on 22nd July 2025.

10. To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting.

The minutes of the meetings held on 30th April 2025 were accepted as true and accurate records of the meeting held. Councillor Strong requested an addition to her comments made therein "in light of the Supreme Court judgement".

11. Next Meeting: Tuesday 22nd July 2025 at 10.00am.

16th July 2025 at 10am.

The meeting ended at **1.20 pm**