

Monmouthshire County Council
Public Participation Strategy



monmouthshire
sir fynwy

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Introduction

Monmouthshire County Council are committed to encouraging members of the public to engage in the democratic process and influence the decisions taken by the Council that effect the everyday lives of residents of Monmouthshire.

This guide has been published to assist residents in understanding the democratic process and the role they can play in local democracy and meets the requirements of Part 3 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. We hope this informs residents and help them understand the processes behind the decisions on what information is available to members of the public to help them get involved.

Meetings Overview

The Council operates under the executive council system. This is where fellow councillors elect a Leader of the Council at every annual general meeting (AGM). The Leader then appoints up to 8 fellow County Councillors to sit on the Cabinet. The Cabinet meet as a whole and make decisions as well each Cabinet member having their own portfolio of services and being able to make decisions individually in their own service areas. The majority of the decisions of the Council will be taken by either Full Council, Cabinet or Individual Cabinet Member Decisions.

These meetings are supported by overview and select committees whose role is to scrutinise decisions taken by Full Council or Cabinet or to present new ideas to the meetings for them to make decisions on. The select committees are split into different topics with varying responsibilities and depending on the nature of the report/decision depends on which select committee it is referred to. The five select committees are Adults, Children and Young People, Economy and Development, Strong Communities and the Public Service Board Select.

There are a number of statutory committees that the council must operate as well as the above including Licensing and Regulatory, Planning and Audit. Other committees include Standards Committee which cover the conduct of councillors, and Democratic Services Committee who oversee the facilities for councillors and promote local democracy. There are also four area committees covering defined areas of Monmouthshire that consider local issues and decisions.

Committee Responsibility and Membership

Adults Select

Adults Select is one of the five select committees in the council who are responsible for scrutinising decisions of the Council and Cabinet to ensure that policies are being implemented correctly and best practice and value for money is achieved. Membership of the select committee is made up of nine members of the council who are not members of the Cabinet.

Adults Select ensure that services are relevant and responsive to the needs of Adults and protect and promote health and well-being, including amongst others the following relevant areas:

- Safeguarding Adults, including Mental Health services and Disability services.
- Adult Social Care, including Domiciliary Care, Residential Care, Nursing Home Care, Community Care, Occupational Therapy, Re-ablement, Assistive Technology, Community Meals Service, Sensory Impairment Services.
- Support to Families and Carers, including Respite and Short Breaks.
- Adult Education, including Learning Disability Services.
- Integrated Adults Services with Health Partners.
- Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.
- Protecting and supporting vulnerable Adults.
- “Transition agenda” from young people to Adults.
- Protecting vulnerable Adults (POVA) and Supporting People.
- Homelessness prevention.
- Domestic Violence Service, Drug and Alcohol Services.
- Public health and wellbeing promotion through Single Integrated Plan.
- Leisure services in terms of health outcomes.
- Welfare Rights.
- Community Legal Service.

Governance and Audit Committee

The Governance and Audit Committee has responsibility for ensuring the authority is operating within its remit and ensures sufficient checks are in place to identify any potential misconduct within the authority. The committee’s main responsibilities include:

- Approving the internal audit strategy, plan & performance
- Review internal audit reports and seek assurances of change where required
- Consider the reports of external audit and inspection agencies
- Consider the effectiveness of the authority’s risk management arrangements
- Maintain an overview of the Council’s Constitution in respect of contract procedure rules and financial regulations
- Make recommendations, as appropriate, to Cabinet and Council on any matters reported through the Audit Committee.

The Governance and Audit Committee consist of eleven members of the council and also includes one lay person member, who is not a member of the council, to ensure transparency and independence in the process.

Area Committees

Monmouthshire is split into four area committees, Severnside, North Monmouthshire, Central Monmouthshire and Lower Wye. Each committee is responsible for a defined area and raising awareness within the Council of local issues.

County Councillors for the wards within the area are invited to attend the meeting which is held locally within the area the committee is responsible for.

Cabinet & Individual Cabinet Members Decisions

Cabinet consist of 8 county councillors, including the leader and deputy/deputies, appointed to the cabinet by the leader of the Council. Each Cabinet member has their own portfolio with responsibility for a number of services within the Council.

Decision for cabinet can be taken by all cabinet members at a cabinet meeting or by the individual cabinet member depending on the type of decision, and its implications, that is to be taken.

The main responsibility of Cabinet is to ensure that council policies are implemented correctly and discharge any other functions that are not the responsibility of the Council.

A list of the cabinet members and their portfolio is available on the Council website.

Children & Young People Select

Children & Young People Select is one of five select committees in the council who are responsible for scrutinising decisions of the Council and Cabinet to ensure that policies are being implemented correctly and best practice and value for money is achieved. Membership of the select committee is made up of nine members of the council who are not members of the Cabinet.

The Children & Young People Select ensure that services are relevant and responsive to the needs of young people and protect and promote their health and well-being, including amongst others the following relevant areas:

- Safeguarding Children, including social care and health, services for vulnerable children and families, Child Protection, Children in Public Care, Home Finding, Family Centres and Aids & Adaptations for disabled children.
- Youth Justice and youth offending service.
- Youth clubs and leisure facilities for young people.
- Special Support Services, Pupil Support Services.
- Education, including School Performance Management, Resource Management, Management, Governor Support, Health & Safety, Financial and ICT Services, School Planning, Transport, Admissions, Student Grants and School Meals.
- Management of Individual Schools Budgets, Schools Delegated Budgets, the Authority's Schools Individually Managed Budgets.

Council

Council is a meeting of all the councillors whose main responsibility is to agree the council budget for the forthcoming year and agree policy framework.

The Council also decide upon the political management framework and decide how councillors should be allocated to other committees both internally and externally.

It is also the role of Council to appoint the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive and agree any changes to the constitution which the council must abide by.

Democratic Services Committee

The Democratic Services Committee consists of eleven councillors. The committee has responsibility for ensuring that the democratic element of the council is operating correctly including ensuring there is sufficient provision of staff, accommodation and resources to support councillors in their role.

The committee are also responsible for appointing the head of democratic services.

It has also has responsibility for promoting and engaging residents in local democracy.

Economy & Development Select

Economy & Development Select is one of five select committees in the council who are responsible for scrutinising decisions of the Council and Cabinet to ensure that policies are being implemented correctly and best practice and value for money is achieved. Membership of the select committee is made up of nine members of the council who are not members of the Cabinet.

Economy & Development Select ensure they are responsive to the needs of businesses, residents and visitors and promote economic activity, including amongst others the following relevant areas:

- Scrutiny of the Management of Regeneration and Culture Directorate.
- Strategic economic development, place shaping and enterprise.
- Promoting and sustaining economic growth.
- Job creation and ensuring opportunities for skills and vocational training.
- Public Health, Environmental Health and Trading Standards.
- Public realm – Culture, libraries, museums and theatre.
- The Planning Function – Building Control, Development Control, Local Development Plans, Economic Development and Housing.
- Scrutiny of collaborative initiatives such as the Shared Resource Service (SRS) and CMC2 and any others as appropriate.
- Procurement.

Licensing and Regulatory Committee

The Licensing and Regulatory Committee is made up of 12 councillors and considers requests from businesses or individuals to hold an event or conduct their business which requires a licence approved by the local authority. There are also regular sub committees of a small number of Licensing and Regulatory Committee members that consider specific applications that require a licence.

More information on licensing is available on the Council website or [available here.](#)

Planning

The role of the Planning Committee is to guide the council in the formulation of its policies relating to Town and Country Planning and to exercise the powers and duties of the council as the Planning Authority.

The Planning Committee also determines applications under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and related legislation in relation to the following:

- planning applications for mineral extraction or waste disposal unless in respect of small-scale works which are ancillary to an existing mineral working or waste disposal facility;
- planning applications accompanied by an Environmental Impact Statement;
- planning applications which represent a significant departure from Structure Plan or Local Plan Policy;
- planning applications which, by their scale, nature or location, have implications which extend beyond the limits of the area in which they are situated.

More information on planning is available on the Council website or [available here](#).

Public Service Board Select

The Public Service Board Select is one of five select committees in the council who are responsible for scrutinising decisions of the Public Service Board. Public Service Boards are a statutory requirement under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and aim to improve the economic and cultural well-being by strengthening joint working across all public services in Wales.

Standards Committee

The Standards Committee are responsible for promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by councillors, co-opted members and church and parent governor representatives. It is their role to assist the above in complying with the members code of conduct and, where necessary, investigating reports or complaints of breach of the code of conduct which extend to town and community councils. The committee must also ensure that the authority's whistle blowing policy and complaints procedure operates effectively.

The standards Committee consists of 3 councillors, 5 co-opted individuals with voting powers and 1 individual from the community.

Strong Communities Select

Strong Communities Select is one of five select committees in the council who are responsible for scrutinising decisions of the Council and Cabinet to ensure that policies are being implemented correctly and best practice and value for money is achieved. Membership of the select committee is made up of nine members of the council who are not members of the Cabinet.

Strong Communities Select ensure they are responsive to the needs of residents and promote their safety and well-being. Key roles for this committee are:

- To ensure the Council supports the development of new and sustainable communities and supports the resilience of existing communities through Local area co-ordination.
- To review and improve the Council's links with the Voluntary Sector.
- To scrutinise the delivery of the Single Integrated Plan, allocating specific scrutiny areas to other select committees where appropriate.
- To scrutinise key services provided in partnership to local communities to ensure effective multi-agency action is delivered, including amongst others:
 - Infrastructure and networks.
 - Highways (including SWTRA), Transport and Traffic Management.
 - Street Lighting.
 - Waste Management.
 - Community Safety.
 - Estates and Sustainability.
 - Facilities and Accommodation Management.
 - Citizen Engagement.
 - Community Safety.
 - Chief Executive Function.
 - Revenues, Council Tax, Non-Domestic Rates and Finance.
 - Corporate Costs / Levies.
 - Appropriations (including external debt costs from earmarked reserves, costs resulting from fixed asset disposal).
 - Financing (including core funding from WG, council tax income).

How do the committees decide what issues to consider and take decisions on?

The majority of committees have a document called a forward work programme. These documents are publicly available for residents to review and be aware of the issues that are up for discussion and at which meeting.

The forward work programmes are populated in a number of ways. Officers of the council will populate it with issues that arise, are scheduled for completion or because there is a legislative requirement to review the current policy. The chair of the committee will also populate the work planner with items that he/she consider important to the committee or have been brought to the chair's attention. Additionally, the chair may populate the work planner with items for discussion that members of the public have asked the committee to consider.

For example, a committee such as standards which covers statutory items and policies, will know the items that it is going to discuss in advance and will only change significantly depending on any issues of councillor misbehaviour that is brought to its attention. However, a select committee or Cabinet forward work planner will change frequently due to decisions that a select committee may call in or the urgency of decisions that the committee must consider.

How can I see what is to be debated at a meeting?

For every meeting of the council, at least five clear working days before, an agenda is published detailing the location, date and time of the meeting as well as a list of items that the committee is to debate. Most items on the agenda will also have reports supporting the item which give details as to why a decision needs to be made, background information relating to the issues of the topic and a recommendation as to what decision should be taken.

All agendas and reports are published on the council website and are available for members of the public to download. A small number of paper copies of the agenda and reports will be made available at the meeting for members of the public. If you wish to receive a hard copy at a meeting it is worthwhile informing democratic services so that they can ensure enough copies are available.

I can't attend a meeting of the Council, how can I find out what has been discussed?

For every meeting of the Council a set of minutes will be made and agreed at the next meeting of that particular committee. The minutes will act as a true record of the proceedings at a particular meeting.

[Watch a meeting of the Council online](#)

Most Council meetings are recorded and streamed live for residents to watch, as well as being stored in an archive for residents to watch at a later date on the Councils Youtube page.

More information and recording of meetings is available on the Council website.

How do I find out about a decision previously taken by the Council?

The Council will make available for inspection for a period of 6 years any agendas, minutes and reports of a committee of the council. If the papers are not available on the Council website you can view paper copies by contacting the democratic services office and inspecting them at the council offices.

How can I influence the decisions that are being made?

Voting

The first way residents can get involved may sound obvious but is probably the most influence that any resident of Monmouthshire has over the County Council. County Councillors are elected to the County Council, usually every five years, by the electors of Monmouthshire. By voting, if you have your say on who it is that represents you within the Council and who is the spokesperson for the area in which you live. The relationship between a councillor and their electorate has to be a two way relationship. They want to keep you as a voter happy to be re-elected and the only way they can achieve that is by representing you in the best way possible in the Council. Next time you vote at any election, rather than thinking of it as a cross on a

piece of paper, think of it as how you want to be represented in the future and who will do the best work for you.

To vote in elections you simply need to be over the age of 16 and registered on the electoral roll with the Council. You can register online at www.gov.uk/registertovote

Contact your local councillor

If you do not wish to attend or speak at a Council meeting, you can always contact your local councillor to discuss issues within your ward. A list of all the County Councillors and their contact details are available on the Council [website here](#).

If you are not sure who your councillor is, you can search [online here](#) or contact the Council who can provide this information to you.

Stand as a councillor

Some residents may not vote because they don't believe that anyone standing for election will represent them sufficiently in the Council. This is where it is your opportunity to stand for election to the Council and personally represent the area in which you reside.

To stand for election to the County Council you must be over 18, be a British, Commonwealth or European citizen and meet one of the following four criteria:

- You are, and will continue to be, registered as a local government elector within the local authority area.
- Occupied as owner or tenant any land or premises within the local authority for the whole 12 months previous to the day of nomination and election.
- Your main or only place of work has been within the local authority area for the whole 12 months previous to the day of nomination and election.
- You have lived within the local authority area for the whole 12 months previous to the day of nomination and election.

You can also stand for election to community and town councils in Monmouthshire with the rules on standing for election similar to the above.

The full elections to the County Council and Community and Town Councils is due in May 2022. Vacancies can arise during the term of office for all councils and are advertised on the County Council website as well as in the local area.

Attend and take part in a meeting

Any resident of Monmouthshire can attend any meeting of the Council and observe the proceedings and debate taking place. Most meetings are held in the Council Chamber at County Hall, Usk which has a dedicated public viewing gallery. Other meetings, such as area committee meetings, are held outside of County Hall but members of the public are welcome to attend those as well. Recently, remote attendance at Council meetings has been introduced so even if you are unable to attend the meeting in person, there may be opportunity for you to participate remotely.

The location, date and start time of meetings are available on the agenda produced for the meeting which is available to download from the Council website.

Any person attending the meeting may be excluded from proceedings where an agenda item has been classified as exempt. Exempt items are usually where sensitive or confidential information may be discussed and is only available to those able to vote on the matter.

[Add an item to an agenda for discussion](#)

There are two ways that a member of the public can encourage a committee to consider an item and have it added to the agenda of a future meeting.

- Any member of the public can contact the chair of a committee and request that they add an item to the forward work programme for future discussion
- Attend a meeting of the relevant committee and request at the meeting under the item forward work programmes that an item is added for future consideration.

[Submit a question to Council](#)

Members of the public are entitled to ask a question of any Member of the Cabinet at a meeting of full Council. Questions are limited to one question per individual or organisation and will be asked in the order notice of them was received unless the chairman of the Council wishes to group certain questions together. The total time allotted to public questions at a Council meeting should be limited to 15 minutes.

A question may only be asked if notice has been given by delivering it in writing or by email to the Head of Democratic Services no later than midday three working days before the day of the meeting. Each person submitting a question must provide their name and address.

A question may be rejected if:

- The question is not about a matter for which the Council has responsibility or which affects the County
- Is defamatory, frivolous or offensive
- Is substantially the same as a question which has been put at a meeting of the Council in the past six months
- Requires the disclosure of confidential or exempt information

The Chairman will invite the questioner to put the question to the relevant Councillor. If a questioner who has submitted a written question is unable to be present, they may ask the chair to put the question to the councillor on their behalf. The chairman may ask the question, indicate that a written reply will be provided by the councillor, or as the questioner is not present decide that the question will not be dealt with.

A questioner may ask one supplementary question without notice to the Councillor which may arise directly out of the original question or the reply.

Any question which cannot be dealt with during the meeting, either due to lack of time or non-attendance of the relevant councillor, will be dealt with by a written response.

Submit views to select committees

Under the Local Government Act (Wales) 2011, any member of the public can attend one of the four select committees held by the Council and submit their views on a particular item on the agenda. The Committee must give full consideration to the views submitted by a member of the public under these arrangements. [Further information on scrutiny is available on the Council website here.](#)

Submit a comment or complaint

A member of the public may comment or complain about a service received by the Council by:

- Contacting their local County Councillor
- Contacting the member of cabinet responsible for the service area
- Contacting the responsible officer at the Council or their line manager
- Using the Councils complaints procedure
- Contacting the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales at 1 Ffordd Yr Hen Gae, Pencoed, CF35 5LJ. Telephone: 0845 601 0987 or via the website www.ombudsman-wales.org.uk.

Comments or complaints regarding the conduct of a councillor should be directed to the Council's Monitoring Officer or the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

Petitions

Creating or taking part in a petition is one way individuals, community groups and organisations can influence decisions that the Council take that impact on local services.

A petition has the ability to:

- Raise awareness of an issue;
- Bring about a change Council Policy or a different way of delivering services
- Prompt members of the Council to take further action, for example asking questions at Full Council
- Lead to, or influence, a debate at a meeting of the Council

Before submitting a petition you should first check with you local Councillor to see if the Council is already acting on your concerns and that the Council is the most appropriate body to receive your petition.

How can I submit a petition?

Monmouthshire County Council already accepts petitions in paper format. These are presented the Chairman of the Council at Full Council meetings by a local councillor on behalf of the person organising the petition.

The introduction of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 enables Councils to introduce E-petitions. E-petitions will make the submission of a petition to the Council quicker and easier whilst allowing the petition organiser to track its progress.

The submission of both paper and e-petitions to the Council are acceptable however people will only be able to sign a petition once regardless of the format they use.

How do petitions work?

You create a petition. Only people or organisations that live, work or study within Monmouthshire are able to create a petition.

If you are using a paper petition there is no set format that needs to be followed and you can devise your own petition for submission. If you wish to create an e-petition as well, you can do so on the Monmouthshire County Council website at the following link [{ENTER LINK}](#)

When you submit an e-petition you will become the 'lead' petitioner and you will be required to provide the Council with basic personal information so that we can contact you.

If you are signing an e-petition you will be required to provide us with basic personal information, including an email address, to enable us to verify the signatures collected are genuine. When you have submitted this information you will be sent an email to the email address you have provided. The email will include a link which must be clicked on to confirm the email address is valid. Once this step is complete your signature will be added to the e-petition. Your name, but no other information, will be published on the e-petitions website.

What happens when the e-petition is complete and how is it submitted?

Your e-petition will need to include:

- A title
- A statement explicitly setting out what action you would like the Council to take
- Any information which you feel is relevant to the e-petition and reasons why you consider the action requested to be necessary. You may include links to other relevant websites.
- A date when you would like your e-petition to live on the website. *Please allow sufficient time for the Council to consider the suitability of the petition and discuss any issues with you.*
- A date when your e-petition will stop collecting signatories. You may want to consider this date in line with the calendar of meetings to ensure the petition is submitted before the relevant meeting of the Council. We will automatically host your petition for 60 days.
- Your name – as lead petitioner your name will be displayed with your e-petition on the Council website.

When an e-petition reaches its closing date, people will no longer be able to sign the petition online. The list of signatories will be collated by Democratic Services and the lead petitioner will be contacted regarding submission of the completed e-petition.

In order for the Council to take action, the petition will require:

Discussion Point

Varying practices as to what level of support requires action to be taken on a petition.

- Minimum number regardless of topic or issue. If happy with this what should the minimum number be?
- Various stages options – if receives less than 50 then nothing is required, over 50 and up to 250 a written response from a chief officer, or over 250 formal submission to Council.
- Open ways in which to submit petitions – rather than just directly through Council should petitions be submitted to Select committees and recommendations followed through. Should Democratic Services Committee monitor petitions that have been submitted between meetings and advise on actions etc.
- Welsh Government have a dedicated petitions committee that consider the actions for any petition that receives over 50 signatories.

A petition that is being presented directly to Council or Cabinet must be presented by a Councillor. Democratic Services will forward the petition and the petitioners details to the relevant ward Councillor following the close of the petition.

What issues can my petition relate to?

Your petition should be relevant to an issue that the Council has powers or duties or on which it has shared delivery responsibilities. It should also be submitted in good faith and be decent, honest and respectful.

Your petition may be rejected if the Councils Monitoring Officer considers it:

- Contains intemperate, inflammatory, abusive or provocative language
- Is defamatory, frivolous, vexatious, discriminatory or otherwise offensive or contains false statements
- Is too similar to another petition submitted within the past six months, particularly where further action has been taken as a result of receiving the petition
- Discloses confidential or exempt information, including information protected by a court order or government department or discloses information that could be considered commercially sensitive.
- Names individuals or provides information where they may be easily identified and is contradictory to GDPR regulations.
- Contains advertising statements or is nonsense.
- Refers to an issue that is currently the subject of a formal Council complaint, consultation, public services ombudsman for Wales complaint or any legal proceedings
- Does not relate to an issue upon which the Council has powers or duties or on which it has shared deliver responsibilities

If a petition is deemed unacceptable then the lead petitioner will be notified along with the reasons for its rejection.

During politically sensitive periods, such as prior to an election, politically controversial material may need to be restricted.

If your petition relates to an issue which is beyond the powers of the Council to address, it may be more appropriate to [start a petition on the Senedd website](#).