

Self-Assessment 2024/25 Summary

We want to be a zero-carbon county, supporting well-being, health and dignity for everyone at every stage of life. We are committed to working with, and alongside, our communities to achieve this. This is the clear purpose established by our Community and Corporate Plan. The annual self-assessment is one of the ways we report on progress and identify where we need to make further improvements. Importantly it allows us to be held to account by elected councillors and local people.

Local authorities deliver a wide range of services. This evaluation cannot cover every one of them. Instead, we have focused on the six objectives in our plan. Beyond the detail you see here, we have scrutiny committees, business plans and performance measures in place. These allow us to be held accountable for all aspects of our work. We also rely on the work of our internal audit team and external regulators such as Audit Wales, Estyn and the Care Inspectorate Wales to provide an independent lens.



This is a summary of a fuller self-assessment which is available on our website (*not yet live*). The assessment also evaluates the effectiveness of the things that are not always visible to residents. These include financial management, use of assets, procurement and HR. Looking at these helps us identify areas for development for the years ahead. You can find these towards the end of this summary.

How well do we understand our local context and place?

Monmouthshire is a great place to live, work and visit. We have made a clear commitment to work with and alongside communities, empowering people to support each other and come up with long-term solutions. One example is the way we have engaged residents and businesses in the production of our replacement Local Development Plan. When approved, it will shape future land use in the county. This will increase opportunities for young people and families to live and work locally. It also contains ambitious commitments to deliver more energy efficient and affordable homes. We are also working in partnership on the production of placemaking plans to improve Monmouthshire's town centres.

In Autumn 2024, just under 1,500 people completed our residents survey. This helped increase our understanding of peoples' perceptions of their local council and the place they live. The survey gave us a baseline so we can measure whether we are getting better. In the past year we have launched the *Let's Talk Monmouthshire* website to make it easier for people to have conversations about the policies and changes that affect them. We will soon be inviting people to join a residents' forum so we can have more in-depth conversations.

How well are we achieving our agreed outcomes?

We have assessed progress against our objectives using a six-point scale. This scores each objective from 1 (unsatisfactory) through to 6 (excellent). After the local elections in May 2022, we took time to understand what matters to people and put the foundations in place for improvement. This included new strategies for the climate, the economy and food. Many of the things we are committed to, such as improving the health of the Wye and Usk rivers, achieving net zero and tackling inequality are complex challenges that will not be solved quickly. This assessment shows a positive trajectory of improvement. The arrows next to each of the objectives below indicate the change in assessment over the past three years while the colours correlate with the scores.

A fair place to live – Our Assessment: 4 (Good)



We have been working hard to improve life chances for people irrespective of their income or background. This includes providing targeted support those experiencing disadvantage. The changes we have been making will take time before they make a difference to outcomes. In the meantime, we have put in place solutions to mitigate the effects of inequality.

We have increased the availability of Flying Start childcare places. Since April 2023 an additional 210 children have benefitted from this, ensuring that more children in disadvantaged areas can access key foundational learning. It also provides parents with free childcare allowing them to return to work which in turn leads to increased household incomes. The number of private childcare places in Monmouthshire has fallen. We recognise that accessing affordable childcare is challenging for some people. We are doing what we can by opening more facilities alongside our primary schools such as the one that opened in Trellech in early 2025.

Healthy, free meals at school can help to reduce food insecurity and improve equity in health and education outcomes. We have gone above our statutory duty to provide free breakfast and a freshly cooked meal at lunchtime to all primary school pupils. Take-up has been increasing but varies between schools. We are working with schools, parents and pupils to understand the reasons for this and doing everything we can to make sure as many people as possible take advantage of this offer.

We have provided targeted support to reduce inequalities, including providing free or subsidised play provision to 2,463 young people in the school holidays. We delivered Food and Fun which provided 8,950 healthy meals to young people. We have also helped residents improve their health and fitness through the national exercise referral scheme. 66% of people who enrolled completed the programme. Three quarters of those reported improved well-being and happiness. We also worked with local people to develop and open the £2.9M Magor and Undy Community Hub which recognised a longstanding need in this growing community.

We are now working to make sure people who would benefit from support can be easily identified. One example is our participation in a pilot scheme to identify residents who may be missing out on means-tested benefits so that we can improve take-up.

A green place to live – Our Assessment: 3 (Adequate)



We are taking local action to reduce our carbon emissions and play our part in tackling global warming. Despite facing systemic challenges to reach our ambition of achieving net zero by 2030 we are making good progress.

We have been busy refitting our public buildings with LED lighting, solar panels and heat pumps. Over time this is reducing energy use and carbon emissions and will result in lower energy bills in the future. We have opened two purpose-built, energy efficient, buildings in the past year to replace ageing facilities; Severn View Park Home and King Henry VIII 3-19 school, a carbon neutral secondary. Construction has pushed up our emissions in the short-term but we will benefit from the environmental and financial benefits for many years to come.

One of the other big sources of emissions is transport. We have increased the percentage of ultra low emission vehicles in our fleet from 8% in 2022 to 16% today. We will continue to increase this on a case-by-case basis. We are developing plans to increase the electric vehicle charging infrastructure in the county, including on street charging. We have also improved walking and cycling routes, often called active travel. We have attracted £6.5M in new funding to the county and have created or enhanced 19 routes in the past year bringing the total to over one hundred. Funding is now in place for a new bridge at Llanfoist.

Our residents have made a significant contribution to the green agenda by recycling 72.18% of household waste last year - one of the highest rates in the UK. We know that river health has been a huge problem and has largely been caused by land use and pollution upstream of our county. We are working with

partners including through the Wye Nutrient Management Board to identify and analyse options for delivering water quality improvements. We have also been working closely with Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water. They are now installing two multi-million pound phosphate stripping plants to improve the health of the Wye and Usk rivers which should result in significant improvements to future water quality. We have also delivered a range of nature-based projects bringing benefits to ecosystem resilience and climate change mitigation.

We are making good progress with the resources we have available. Scorecards published by Climate Emergency UK show that Monmouthshire has improved its work towards net zero over the past two years and is the second-best performer in Wales in relation to climate emergency action, increasing 9 places compared with 2023. This independent assessment also rated Monmouthshire as the top performing local authority in the UK in terms of waste reduction and food. We recognise that we are unlikely to achieve our ambition of becoming a net zero organisation by 2030 unless there is a significant increase in funding. However, the independent external assessment has provided assurance that we are putting the groundwork in place to ensure a positive future trajectory.

A thriving and ambitious place – Our Assessment: 4 (Good)



We have worked in partnership with others, including the Cardiff Capital Region, to deliver a range of projects that are contributing to a local diverse economy in which businesses and workers can thrive. We have produced a new local transport strategy for Monmouthshire which was approved in May 2024. This sets clear priorities for the next five years. We have also contributed to the development of the regional transport plan.

In April 2024 we secured up to £8.4m to implement transport projects across the county to enhance access, safety and infrastructure. We have made changes to local bus services, with a new operator taking over some routes and several services being adjusted to improve connections and efficiency. We have worked with an active group of residents to make the case for investment in a new Magor Walkway station to improve connectivity. The UK Government has indicated that it will prioritise funding for this station, bringing environmental and economic benefits to the area.

Like all parts of the UK we have a highways maintenance backlog that exceeds the available funding. To begin to address this we have allocated an additional £2.3M of capital expenditure in our 2025-26 budget for infrastructure with the majority being spent on road improvements.

We have established placemaking partnerships in all six towns in the county. These have involved local residents, business and voluntary organisations. We secured over £800k in funding from Welsh Government for town centre improvements in 2024/25. So far improvements have been made to 17 town centre buildings and commercial properties, bringing previously vacant properties back into use. This is helping to contribute to the vibrancy of town centres throughout our county. Projects include improvements to the youth centre in Caldicot and the refurbishment of a previously run-down building in Chepstow for use as a local community food project. 72% of people responding to our residents' survey felt very or fairly satisfied with their local area as a place to live.

There has been an increase in the percentage of school leavers who were NEET from 1.8% (14 young people) in 2022 to 3.1% (25 young people) last year. We recognise this is an area we need to improve. We have developed a new Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) Prevention Strategy. The strategy demonstrates our commitment ensuring better outcomes and opportunities for young people, through collaborative work.

We have provided advice or assistance to 89 local businesses as part of our commitment to enable people of all ages and backgrounds to have the skills to do well in work or start their own business. This is below the target we had set ourselves and broadly unchanged from the number assisted in 2022. 79.9% of Monmouthshire's population is economically active. This is consistent with the position in 2022 and remains above the average rates for Wales and Great Britain. Overall Monmouthshire is ranked as the second most economically competitive area in Wales, behind Cardiff.

A safe place to live – Our Assessment: 4 (Good)

We have taken action to reduce homelessness and have put plans in place to ensure the future supply of good quality, energy efficient homes.

We have prepared a replacement Local Development Plan and undertaken a public consultation on this. The plan sets out how land will be used for homes and employment up to 2033. In line with our climate commitments, all new properties will incorporate renewable energy generation technology, low carbon heating systems and electric vehicle charging points. As well as the environmental benefits this will reduce energy bills for these households. We have also committed to 50% of the homes on each site being affordable with a mix of housing types to meet local need.

The development of new properties has been limited in recent years due to planning restrictions resulting from high phosphate levels in rivers. We delivered 71 affordable homes in 2024/25, the highest figure in the past three years, bringing the total over that period to 198. We also granted planning permission for 108 affordable homes, more than double the total for the previous year.

High property prices and a shortage of affordable private rented accommodation have contributed to a rising homeless problem in Monmouthshire. We have adopted a rapid rehousing approach. In 2024/25 we successfully prevented 71% households at risk, from becoming homeless, a significant improvement on the 2022 figure of 50%. We have also been acquiring or repurposing properties as alternatives to unsuitable and costly B&B accommodation. As a result, we have been able to reduce the number of homeless households placed into B&B from 90 in 2022 to 20 in 2024/25. Alongside this, we have reduced B&B use for families with children to zero.

We have worked with young people across the county to address concerns of knife crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB). We secured funding for a pilot scheme in Caldicot in 2024, increasing the support available from youth workers and targeting young people involved in ASB through a total of 121 sessions. This has resulted in a 23% decrease in ASB incidents in the town. Overall, anti-social behaviour rates across the county have reduced marginally in the past three years, although the overall crime rate in the county has increased. The residents survey found that 90% of respondents felt safe in their local area during the day, while 66% felt safe after dark.

A connected place where people are valued – Our Assessment: 4 (Good)

We are changing the way we provide services to ensure that Monmouthshire is a place where people's contributions are valued, they feel part of a community and are connected to others. We are doing this by taking a more preventative approach, intervening earlier and bringing some provision back into the county.

Social Services spending is taking an increasing proportion of our budget each year as a result of increasing demand and more complex needs. There are many factors that affect our health and well-being. We have committed to working in different ways to address the root-causes of this, becoming what is known as a Marmot Region. One of the ways we are doing this is by developing a more preventative approach where early help and enabling people is at the forefront. This was an area of development identified in our last self-assessment.

Early help is vital to prevent children coming into local authority care. We have established a coordinated approach to early intervention in children's social services. We have overseen a gradual reduction in the number of children looked after from 209 to 190 over the past three years. We are also developing more in-county residential and supported accommodation. One development has been completed and three more are in the pipeline. This allows children to maintain local connections and helps us reduce costs.

The recruitment of foster carers is a significant challenge across the UK. We have improved our offer to foster carers and advertised extensively. We have achieved a small increase, but this is not sufficient to

meet our needs. 35.8% of placements of children looked after were with in-house foster carers. This is marginally less than in the previous year and below the target of 43% we set for ourselves

We want to help vulnerable older people regain their independence. We provided 309 reablement care packages last year compared to 240 in 2021/22. In 55.7% of cases this mitigated or reduced peoples' need for long-term support. When people do need longer-term care it can sometimes be hard to source the care they need. We have had a relentless focus on this working with our partners, and we are now meeting 98.2% of assessed needs for care at home, up from 96.6% in the previous year. We have more than halved the amount of unmet care hours since 2022.

In March 2024 we opened a new purpose-built specialist care home for people living with dementia. The home has 32 bedrooms for both long-term support and short-term support in the form of respite based on a relationship-centred care model.

Overall, 84.7% of adults in receipt of social services told us they were happy with the care and support they received. This is about the same as the previous year but around five percentage points lower than pre-pandemic levels.

A learning place – Our Assessment: 4 (Good)



We have worked with the regional Education Achievement Service to provide challenge, monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning in schools. This is part of our commitment to make Monmouthshire a place where everybody experiences the best possible start in life and has the opportunity to learn, developing the skills and knowledge they will need to reach their potential.

In 2024 our secondary schools achieved higher results than elsewhere in Wales. The average capped 9 points score was 369.8 in Monmouthshire, compared to an average of 358.1 across Wales. Most of our pupils performed in line with their expectations. Overall, 27.5% of pupils across Monmouthshire achieved 5 or more GCSE at levels A*-A, compared with 18.1% for Wales. We also have fewer pupils leaving school with no qualifications.

We have developed a new Inclusion Strategy and an updated Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Policy to shape our work with children and young people. We have secured Shared Prosperity funding to deliver the Inspire Programme. This has enabled us to support 340 young people since January 2023, providing life skills and qualifications which improve their future life chances.

We are committed to ensuring the needs of vulnerable learners, which includes those eligible for free school meals, are being met. On average, Monmouthshire pupils who are eligible for free school meals performed better than those in other parts of Wales. Despite this, the attainment of learners eligible for free school meals is lower than those who are not eligible. We will continue to work with schools to explore actions to narrow this divide.

We continue to work with schools to improve attendance. There has been a gradual improvement in primary school attendance since the pandemic. At the end of the academic year 2023/24 attendance was 93.6%; provisional data shows attendance has increased to 94.1% in the summer term 2024/25. Attendance in secondary schools has been slower to return to pre-pandemic levels. Attendance was 88.2% in the academic year 2023/24. Provisional figures show this had improved to 90.1% by the summer term 2024/25.

We have continued to develop our support to reduce and prevent behaviours that challenge in our schools. We have implemented a whole school approach to emotional and mental well-being. This helps schools to understand how they are best placed to promote well-being.

We have completed the construction of the new King Henry VIII 3-19 school in Abergavenny. The building is the first operationally net zero carbon all-through school in Wales, in line with our commitment to decarbonise our operations. It provides a hub for learning in Abergavenny, creating an environment in which young people can thrive as well as well improving leisure facilities for the wider community. It is anticipated that the development will reduce the number of pupils attending a secondary school out-of-county.

How effectively are resources being used to deliver our priorities?

Over the past year we have developed enabling strategies to ensure we align all of our resources to deliver the priorities set out in the Community and Corporate Plan. We have evaluated these and concluded that we have sound arrangements in place to enable and support service delivery.

The Well-being of Future Generations Act defines the core set of activities that are common to the corporate governance of public bodies. We have assessed each of these using our evaluation framework:

Corporate planning, performance and risk management. We assessed this as level 4 (Good) – Unchanged from last year.	↔
Financial planning. We assessed this as level 4 (Good). Unchanged from last year.	↔
Workforce planning (people). We assessed this as level 4 (Good). An improvement on last years' assessment score.	↑
Procurement. We assessed this as level 3 (Adequate). Unchanged from last year.	↔
Assets. We assessed this as level 5 (Very Good). An improvement on last years' assessment score.	↑
Digital and data. We assessed this as level 3 (Adequate). Unchanged from last year.	↔
Democracy and scrutiny. We assessed this as level 4 (Good). Unchanged from last year.	↔

Further detail on these is available as part of the full evaluation available at:
www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/improvement. *(not yet live)*

How effectively does the council work with stakeholders and partners on agreed outcomes?

Working in partnership is one of the ways we can achieve our objectives while delivering value for money. Key partners include Welsh Government, the Cardiff Capital Region and the Gwent Public Services Board. A review conducted by our Internal Audit Team identified a reasonable level of assurance was in place for the authority's governance arrangements based on a sample of partnerships. We have now developed a toolkit and guidance to strengthen our arrangements in this area.

Areas for Development

As a result of the self-assessment, we have identified a number of areas for development. These include:

- Develop more childcare places, including Flying Start and Welsh medium places.
- Develop solutions to tackle the rise in young people not in education, employment or training.
- Strengthen our capacity and capability in digital and data to deliver impact at scale.
- Strengthen our procurement arrangements to ensure we can deliver the ambition within our Socially Responsible Procurement Strategy.

Measuring Progress

We use a wide range of performance measures to evaluate our progress against our priorities. These are found throughout the assessment. We also track progress against a range of outcome measures at population level. Key measures are presented regularly to Cabinet and the Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee so that we can actively manage performance and adjust delivery where we are falling short of our expectations.

What do you think?

We have used some of the feedback we have received from other organisations to shape this report and would be delighted to hear your views to help us inform future assessments.

Please e-mail us: improvement@monmouthshire.gov.uk

