

Monmouthshire Scrutiny

Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee ~ Feedback to Cabinet of Meeting held on 23rd September 2025

Report Item 4: Revenue Monitoring Update

The committee discussed the council's financial position, highlighting ongoing risks such as school reserve balances and the impact of inflation and National Insurance increases on costs. Members raised the need for clearer public communication about council spending, suggesting simplified charts with council tax bills. Updates were provided on overspends at council properties, with explanations that new tenancies and marketing efforts are improving occupancy. The management of staff vacancies was explored, clarifying that not all vacancies are budgeted and that senior sign-off is required for filling posts. The use of solar panels on council properties was considered, with the feasibility depending on building structure and tenant arrangements. Car park overspends were attributed to under-recovery of penalty charges, and recruitment of additional enforcement officers was expected to help. The value of hosting major events was discussed, with economic impact reports to be shared when available. The committee also examined the use of council assets, support for tenants installing renewables, and the ongoing review of staffing levels and well-being. The process for determining staffing in social care was explained as demand-led and regularly reviewed. Enforcement of car parking penalties and debt recovery processes were outlined, and the management of supply teaching costs and school facility use was discussed. Overspends on school transport and public concerns about safe routes were acknowledged as important for communication. The committee also addressed the appropriateness of insurance thresholds for supply teaching. In terms of social care expenditure, increases were linked to service transfers, new responsibilities, and rising demand. The use of contingency funds for National Insurance shortfalls was confirmed, with a need for continued financial discipline. The rise in high-cost care packages was attributed to demographic changes, increased complexity, and shifting health eligibility thresholds, with ongoing discussions between social care and health services.

Report Item 5: Chief Officer for Social Care Annual Report

The annual report for social care was presented, structured around people, prevention, partnerships, and well-being. The benefits of stable leadership and systemic changes in adult services were highlighted, including new pathways for

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domiciliary care and reablement. Efforts to build long-term sustainability, manage workforce challenges, and adapt to demographic changes were described. In children's services, the focus was on supporting children to remain at home, developing in-house placements, and improving foster carer recruitment and support. The importance of workforce well-being and professional development was emphasised. The chair praised the report's accessibility and the value of sharing it widely. Committee members discussed the proportion of care leavers not in employment, education, or training, noting that all are individually supported. The use of direct payments was explored, with numbers fluctuating due to suitability and recent commissioning changes. Recruitment and retention challenges were noted, particularly in direct services. Safeguards for managing direct payments were outlined, including social worker reviews and support services. Lower adult satisfaction rates compared to the COVID period were discussed, with ongoing efforts to improve communication and quality assurance. The committee examined learning from complaints, support for direct payments, and discrepancies in looked after children numbers. The challenge of meeting future service demand due to demographic changes was acknowledged, with the Local Development Plan aiming to attract younger families and provide affordable housing for care workers. The importance of workforce grants and the risk of future cuts were noted, and improvements in children's and adult social care performance were recognised.

Report Item 6: Safeguarding Annual Report

The safeguarding annual report was introduced, covering arrangements for vulnerable adults and children. The evolving nature of safeguarding was emphasised, with new risks such as exploitation and the ongoing impact of COVID. The report assessed five key domains: governance, workforce, prevention, protection, and safe services, noting strengths and areas for improvement. The committee discussed the rise in harmful sexual behaviour in schools, attributing it to both increased incidence and greater awareness, with online influences and post-COVID complexities contributing. Collaboration with education and youth services was ongoing. The meaning of practitioner concern categories was clarified, and the impact of sharing one-page profiles in the Public Transport Unit was discussed, with follow-up on previous case numbers offered. Amber ratings in the action plan were explained as reflecting ongoing or carried-over actions. The chair commended safeguarding work, suggested clearer labelling of the report as a self-evaluation, and encouraged inclusion of more service user feedback. The link between permanent exclusions in

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schools and knife carrying/use was questioned, with no clear direct link established and further data to be sought from education colleagues.