

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of People Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk on Tuesday, 30th September, 2025 at 10.00 am

Councillors Present

County Councillor Jackie Strong (Chair)

County Councillors: Jan Butler, Christopher Edwards, Simon Howarth, Penny Jones, Maureen Powell, Martyn Groucutt, Jill Bond, Ian Chandler and Peter Strong

Officers in Attendance

Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer
Jane Rodgers, Chief Officer for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health
Naomi Lovesay, Service Manager - Direct Care Services
Jenny Jenkins, Head of Adult Services
Nicola Needle, Integrated Well-Being Network Lead

APOLOGIES: Councillors Sue Riley and Maria Stevens

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were also received from Councillor Stevens, who was being substituted by Councillor Peter Strong. Apologies were received from Councillor Riley who was being substituted by Councillor Bond.

2. Declarations of Interest

None declared.

3. Public Open Forum

None Present.

4. Community Meals - Scrutiny of an approach to ensure a good quality and sustainable service model for Community Meals

Councillor Chandler explained the review was initiated due to budget pressures identified in social care, specifically the subsidy for Community Meals. Rather than making quick decisions, a thorough review was chosen to assess the service's value and explore alternative models, including both in-house and external options. The review's terms of reference were shared with the relevant committee, and the outcome was brought forward for examination, regardless of whether recommendations were radical or minor. The conclusion was to retain the service in-house, modernize it, improve user experience, and seek efficiencies to reduce the subsidy.

Naomi outlined the review process, which began in spring. The aim was to get a comprehensive picture of the service and identify opportunities for change. Key findings included high user satisfaction, strong feedback on nutritional and social benefits, and a preference for a hot lunchtime meal. The review also identified opportunities to

modernize delivery (e.g., using EVs and plug-in hot boxes), benchmarked costs with other authorities, and highlighted the need for further work to make the service more efficient and sustainable.

Key Questions from Members:

- Councillor Howarth asked whether the benchmarking for service costs included only Torfaen or also other similar rural authorities like Denbighshire, noting that Monmouthshire's rural nature could affect costs and comparability. He highlighted the significant cost difference with Torfaen and questioned if a more similar comparator had been used.

Officers responded and acknowledged Torfaen was used for initial benchmarking due to ease of engagement but recognised the differences in geography and population density. It was confirmed that in the next phase, comparisons would be expanded to include more similar authorities like Denbighshire, as suggested by Councillor Howarth, to ensure more relevant benchmarking.

- Councillor Jones asked about the type of training provided to Community Meals drivers, especially as their role aligns with domiciliary care and involves important social contact with residents. She wanted to know how drivers are prepared to handle issues they might encounter during deliveries.

Officers explained that all drivers receive a robust induction, mandatory training, and additional training in safeguarding and first aid. Drivers are supported by senior staff for debriefing and supervision if they encounter issues, and ongoing workforce planning will address any further training needs as the service evolves.

- Councillor Bond asked if there are sufficient resources to complete all phase two actions, such as implementing digital solutions and conducting reviews, or if extra resources will be needed.

Officers confirmed the work will be done within existing resources by forming a small project team from relevant departments, with no additional resource requests planned. Staff with digital skills are already available for the project.

- Councillor Bond questioned the Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA), specifically about the impact on care leavers and care-experienced people, and whether there are any legal implications for this group.

The response clarified that most service users are elderly, with no known care leavers receiving community meals, so there is no direct impact. However, it was acknowledged that care-experienced people could be present in the cohort, and the IIA could be updated to reflect this consideration.

- Councillor Bond also asked about the significant increase in numbers in Caldicot and whether there was an explanation for this.

Officers indicated that numbers fluctuate dynamically based on assessed need, and there is no specific reason identified for the increase in Caldicot.

- Councillor Butler asked about the use of locally based foods in the service, specifically how much local food is used in the meals and where the meals are prepared, as well as how many people are employed in meal preparation.

The explanation given was that currently, meals are purchased from a large, non-local supplier providing frozen plated meals. Phase two will explore options for sourcing and preparing meals locally, including potential procurement from local suppliers. The number of people employed in meal preparation was not specified.

- Councillor Butler also asked about the mechanism for residents to access the service.

The response given stated that referrals are currently made via adult social care intake, requiring an assessed need. Phase two will consider whether self-referral or a broader preventative model could be appropriate.

Chair's Summary:

The Chair concluded by highlighting interest in local-based opportunities from the review, reassuring that Monmouthshire is not discontinuing community meals but is exploring alternative delivery methods, and suggested that if there were no further questions, the Committee could thank the officers and move to the next agenda item.

5. Whole Authority Approach to Wellbeing and Prevention - Scrutiny of a strategy to take forward a whole authority approach to wellbeing and prevention

Councillor Chandler introduced the Whole Authority Approach to Wellbeing and Prevention strategy, emphasising its long-term vision to improve resident well-being and reduce reliance on statutory services. He noted the strategy is intended to be adopted by cabinet and will coordinate efforts across all council directorates and with external partners, marking a shift from previous approaches.

Jane Rodgers expanded on the ambition for a cross-directorate, coordinated plan focused on better outcomes for residents, using data insights, a clear practice model, and partnership working. She stressed the strategy's aim to address vulnerabilities, support independence, and tackle health inequalities, positioning it as a platform for both internal and external collaboration.

Key Issues raised by Members

- Councillor Jones commented on the importance of including town and community councils in the wellbeing strategy, highlighting their role in supporting and funding local projects that address social isolation and digital skills. She requested that representatives from community councils be involved in the working groups for the strategy.

In response, Jane Rodgers acknowledged that while explicit reference to community councils may not be in the strategy document, they were considered in discussions. She affirmed that town and community councils are part of their thinking and that the community development team engages directly with them, emphasising their value in understanding and supporting local needs.

- Councillor Jones further pointed out the significance of small grants from community councils in enabling local groups to operate, reinforcing her earlier point about their practical contribution.
- Councillor Powell shared a personal story about a relative who lost well-being after being moved from their home to a care facility, emphasising the importance of supporting people to remain in their own homes where they feel comfortable and familiar.

Jane Rodgers responded by recognising the progress made in supporting people to stay at home, mentioning the use of assistive technology and the focus on enabling individuals to maintain independence and connections with loved ones, which aligns with the aims of the strategy.

- Councillor Bond suggested the governance structure should include education experts or a cabinet member, arguing that preventative work should start earlier and include education to address socio-economic and health habits from a young age. Councillor Bond highlighted the representation of certain groups in the integrated impact assessment and stakeholder plan, noting some groups may not be adequately included.

Jane explained the strategy's current focus is on adults with vulnerabilities for a 2–5-year period, but acknowledged the importance of early intervention and education, noting that broader inclusion may come in future iterations. She clarified that prevention work for children is ongoing in other areas and that alignment will develop over time.

Councillor Chandler added that the broader public health approach and Marmot region ambitions are underway, and the strategy is intended to create momentum before expanding scope.

- Councillor Bond also questioned the process mapping approach, recommending it start from the user's perspective rather than just identifying gaps in current services, and emphasised comprehensive stakeholder engagement to avoid missing groups not currently reached.

Jane and Nikki Needle addressed process mapping, stating that both user-cantered and service-based approaches are needed, and described practical steps like community conversations and small-scale mapping to iteratively improve the strategy.

- Councillor Butler questioned the implementation phase, specifically the work stream on community assets and facilities, highlighting the importance of community and town councils in enabling well-being activities and noted the large number of community venues beyond those

owned by the council. She asked for clarification on the status of the assessment surveys for community hubs and venues, expressing concern that, as secretary of a local community centre, they were unaware of any survey taking place and wanted clarification on progress and timelines.

Jane responded that the timelines in the plan need updating, acknowledged the commitment of the officer leading the work, and explained that choices must be made about the scope of mapping due to resource constraints. She described the approach of starting small, learning from mapping a local area, and building understanding iteratively, while emphasising the need for realistic expectations about timeframes and the importance of purposeful action.

Jane confirmed that no survey had been missed and it is still on the to-do list.

- Councillor Butler acknowledged the challenges of reaching ground-level understanding and the importance of local groups and volunteers.
- Councillor Groucutt commented on the importance of education in community well-being, referencing his experience as a former Cabinet member for education and newly elected Chair of Governors at a local school. He highlighted the challenge of declining school attendance since the pandemic, noting that regular attendance is crucial for learning and future life chances. He also acknowledged that while home education is a parental right, he felt that most children benefit from being in school with peers.

Councillor Chandler responded that he agreed with Councillor Groucutt and emphasised that improving attendance and reducing absenteeism is a top priority for the education team. He clarified that although these issues are not included in the current strategy, they are being addressed elsewhere in the council, and the strategy aims to focus on new directions and changes rather than duplicating existing work.

- Councillor Howarth referenced previous council meetings where he had raised concerns about unknown numbers of non-attending children. He suggested that the committee should further explore the extent of this issue and requested feedback from senior officers on the findings of such an exploratory exercise, emphasising the importance of understanding how many children are affected.

It was confirmed that the next meeting of the People Scrutiny Committee would discuss Children Missing in Education Policy and Elective Home Education Monitoring reports.

Chair's Summary:

The Chair concluded that the Committee had held a productive discussion on the strategy, with several comments offered for officers to consider in refining the document. She noted the recognition of the significant role of local communities, town, and community councils in supporting well-being initiatives.

The Chair concluded that the Committee expressed general support for the direction of the strategy, understanding the focus on supporting people as they age and helping them remain independent at home. She thanked the officers and the Cabinet Member Councillor Chandler for the report.

6. People Scrutiny Forward Work Programme and Action List

Councillor Howarth raised the Tudor Street lease and next steps. He was advised that the item is not yet on the cabinet planner and is not expected before January 2026, to allow the full 12 months to demonstrate proof of concept. It was confirmed that the issue would be raised with cabinet, noting there will be significant public interest.

Councillor Howarth requested the item be added to forward work planner.

7. Council and Cabinet Work Planner

Noted.

8. Minutes of the previous meetings

The minutes of the 16th July 2025 and the 22nd July 2025 were approved as true and accurate records, proposed by Councillor Butler and seconded by Councillor Powell.

9. Next Meeting

25th November 2025 at 10.00am.

The meeting ended at **11.46 am**.