

SUBJECT: PANEL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

MEETING: Governance and Audit Committee

DATE: 4th June 2026

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To provide Governance and Audit Committee with the Panel Performance Assessment report and the authority's draft response to the recommendations in line with the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.
- 1.2 To enable the committee to review the draft response of the council to ensure this is appropriate and to make recommendations for changes to the response, where required.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the committee seeks assurance that the council's response to the Panel Performance Assessment's recommendations is appropriate and recommend any changes to the response where necessary.

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 Commissioning an external Panel Performance Assessment is a requirement under section 92 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. The Act requires councils to make arrangements for an independent panel, appointed by the council, to assess the extent to which the council is meeting the performance requirements. Namely:
 - exercising its functions effectively;
 - using its resources economically, efficiently and effectively; and
 - having effective governance in place for securing the above.
- 3.2 This must take place at least once every electoral cycle and supplements the annual self-assessment report, the most recent of which was presented to the committee in July 2025 and approved by Council on 18th September 2025. Monmouthshire's panel assessment took place during the week commencing 23rd February 2026. The panel assessment is also part of the Council's ongoing commitment to transparency, improvement, and assurance for both councillors and residents.

3.3 Monmouthshire's panel was chaired by Beverley Smith. Beverley is the former Chief Executive of North West Leicestershire District Council and currently holds a number of Board roles including chair of the Local Boundary Commission for England. The remaining panel members included:

- Senior Member Peer: Cllr Darren Price, serving Councillor and former Leader of Carmarthenshire County Council.
- Serving Local Government Senior Officer: Louise Davies, Director of Community Services, Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council.
- Peer from the wider public, private, voluntary sector: Chris Naylor, Consultant, Managing Director and former Chief Executive of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham.

3.4 The detailed scope of the assessment was determined by the Cabinet. The scope was developed and informed by the Council's priorities set in the Community and Corporate Plan and learning from the self-assessment process. The development of the scope involved informal discussions with Cabinet, the Strategic Leadership Team, discussions with the WLGA, and was also presented to Governance and Audit Committee at their November meeting. The scope for the Monmouthshire Panel Performance Assessment was:

- How well does the council align across directorates to optimise delivery of the priorities set out in the Community and Corporate Plan?
- What opportunities are there to further develop the council's emerging person-centred and preventative approaches to working with its communities, local businesses and other stakeholders, (including town and community councils)?
- How well are we able to demonstrate the intended outcomes and emerging impacts of our Community and Corporate Plan and, how well do we communicate them to councillors, residents and other stakeholders, including town and community councils and local businesses?

The panel was asked to review the above and offer positive suggestions on how the above facets of our work can be improved.

3.5 The panel was also guided in their assessment by the ways of working and corporate governance headings set out in the Well-being of Future Generations Act: Corporate planning; Financial Planning; Workforce Planning (people); Procurement; Assets; Risk Management and Performance Management.

3.6 The panel were provided with a range of information to inform their findings, including information scrutinised by Governance and Audit Committee such as the self-assessment report, annual governance statements and strategic risk register. During their visit, the panel met with more than 120 people over the course of the week including: a politically balanced focus group of backbench councillors nominated by group leaders; focus groups of officers at all tiers of the organisation; volunteers; business leaders; town and community councillors; trade unions; leaders of other public sector organisations and most importantly focus groups of local people.

- 3.7 The panel's findings have been included in a report which is attached as appendix 1. The headline conclusion was:

Monmouthshire is an ambitious, well-run Council with communities at its heart and a reach that transcends boundaries.

- 3.8 Within their report, the panel have made the following recommendations:
- Prioritising major opportunities to deliver better outcomes for residents at lower costs.
 - Strengthening community resilience and shared understanding.
 - Completing the development of Workforce and Succession Planning.

- 3.9 The authority is required to produce a response to the report. This must include:
- The extent to which it accepts the conclusions in the report;
 - The extent to which the council intends to follow any recommendations contained in the report; and
 - Any actions it proposes to take to increase the extent to which it meets the performance requirements.

The council's draft response can be found in appendix 2.

- 3.10 The statutory guidance identifies a specific role for the Governance and Audit Committee within the process:

"The council must make a draft of its response to the panel performance assessment available to its governance and audit committee, which must then review the draft response and may make recommendations for changes to the response to the panel assessment.

"If the council does not make a change recommended by the governance and audit committee, it must set out in the final response the recommendation and the reasons why it did not make the change."

- 3.11 It is therefore important to ensure that the committee is provided with the opportunity to review and make any changes, if needed, to the draft response to the Panel Performance Assessment and is able to gain assurance of the effectiveness of actions put in place as a result of the recommendations. This also forms part of the committee's remit to assure itself of the effectiveness of the authority's performance management and governance arrangements.
- 3.12 Following review and consideration of any changes from Governance and Audit Committee. The panel's report and the authority's response to it will be presented to full council on 25 June 2026 ahead of formal publication.
- 3.13 The progress in implementing the actions in the response will subsequently be monitored through the council's established performance management framework. A

specific evaluation of progress will also form part of the annual self-assessment report, which is presented to Governance and Audit Committee.

- 3.14 The committee may wish to familiarise itself with the underpinning Statutory guidance on Part 6, Chapter 1, of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. The relevant information can be located in chapter 3, accessible via:
<https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-03/performance-governance-of-principal-councils.pdf>

4. REASONS:

- 4.1 To provide independent assurance on the council's ambitions and delivery, support continuous improvement, and meet the statutory requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

5. AUTHOR:

Matthew Gatehouse, Chief Officer – People, Performance and Partnerships

6. CONTACT DETAILS:

Tel: 01633 644397

E-mail: matthewgatehouse@monmouthshire.gov.uk

Appendix 2

Monmouthshire County Council response to Panel Performance Assessment Report February 2026

The statutory guidance under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 requires the council to complete a response to the panel performance assessment report. In its response, the council is required to state:-

- the extent to which it accepts the conclusions in the report;
- the extent to which the council intends to follow any recommendations contained in the report; and
- any actions it proposes to take to increase the extent to which it meets the performance requirements.

This action plan sets out the council's response to each of the recommendations in the Monmouthshire County Council Panel Performance Assessment Report February 2026.

Ref	PPA Recommendation	Council response & action	Timescale & responsibility holder
1.	Prioritising major opportunities to deliver better outcomes for residents at lower costs. The Panel recommends that the Council focus and prioritise major opportunities that will deliver better outcomes for residents at a lower cost. The Council must establish a clear mechanism to identify, assess and exploit these opportunities, supported by a structured plan to be completed by the end of 2026/27. The plan should include: • A robust assessment of the investment required; • Consideration of organisational capacity to deliver; • Expected returns, including both financial savings and improved outcomes; • Alignment with the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP). Realising these opportunities requires discipline, sequencing and a strong organisational narrative linking change to outcomes and financial resilience	The Council accepts this recommendation and will implement the following response. <u>Context</u> For Purpose, on Purpose (F-POP) provides the council's clear mechanism to identify, assess, prioritise and govern major change opportunities to deliver better outcomes and/or lower costs. The Programme Assurance Board oversees the whole change portfolio ensuring it is aligned with our purpose. This includes: identifying and scoping challenges and opportunities, developing business cases, managing risks and dependencies, ensuring organisational readiness, monitoring benefits/value realisation, and ensuring alignment with the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP). A delivery plan for F-POP has been developed and is overseen by the Programme Assurance Board.	Chief Executive

		<u>Actions</u> • Establish and maintain a single, live change portfolio within FPOP (including major opportunities), with clear entry criteria, stage-gates and decision papers routed via the Programme Assurance Board (PAB). • Apply the FPOP Benefits and Value Framework to assess investment required, organisational capacity, expected returns (financial and non-financial) and delivery confidence; use this to prioritise opportunities and sequence delivery. • Strengthen programme management discipline through the FPOP Programme Management Office (PMO), including consistent templates, reporting, risk management and a portfolio dashboard to support early intervention where delivery is off-track. • Ensure opportunities that require Member decisions progress through existing approval routes (Cabinet/Council) with clear business cases and benefits realisation expectations.	Short Term: now – September 2026 Short Term: now – September 2026 Medium Term: October 2026 – March 2027 Long Term: April 2027 – December 2027
2.	Strengthening Community Resilience and Shared Understanding. The Panel recommends that the Council works with communities and partners to develop a shared understanding of “community resilience” within the Monmouthshire context. This shared definition will enable better measurement of impact and help clarify the difference the Council and its partners aim to make. Key points include: • Using community insight to understand impact and well-being outcomes;	The Council accepts this recommendation and will implement the following response. <u>Context</u> We will adopt Resilient Communities as a single, consistent framing for this work. This provides a shared and strengths-based narrative aligned to the council’s values and responds directly to the PPA’s call for a clear, Monmouthshire specific understanding of community resilience.	Head of Customer, Communication and Engagement.

	• Ensuring prevention plans maximise social capital, which stakeholders identified as a major strength; • Strengthening purposeful communication and engagement with communities, drawing on the placemaking model; • Ensuring all communities - particularly in a large rural county - have a voice in shaping local priorities. Stakeholders are ready and willing to work with the Council and that co-design is essential for meaningful progress.	The approach complements the Living Well Strategy by providing the community level conditions that support prevention, early help and independence. <u>Actions</u> • Co-produce a clear, practical definition of Resilient Communities with communities, partners, Town and Community Councils and frontline officers, with equity embedded throughout the process. • Undertake proportionate mapping of existing community assets, networks and activity, focusing on strengths and gaps that matter for prevention. This will include a digital community asset map, supported by local points of contact for residents who are less digitally enabled. • Move from broad engagement to targeted action by identifying a small number of priority places and/or themes where strengthening Resilient Communities can deliver the greatest preventative and equity benefit. • Establish a Resilient Communities Network to support alignment, shared learning and reduced duplication across the Council, partners, health, the voluntary sector and Town & Community Councils. • Use a proportionate mix of lived experience, qualitative insight and proxy measures to demonstrate progress, reflecting the PPA's expectations for meaningful short and medium term evidence. <u>FPOP linkage</u> Where the Resilient Communities approach translates into specific change projects (e.g., digital community	Short Term: now – September 2026 Medium Term: October 2026 – March 2027 Long Term: April 2027 – December 2027
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		asset map, priority place-based interventions), these will be captured within the FPOP change portfolio so progress, risks and benefits can be tracked consistently through corporate governance.	
3.	Workforce and Succession Planning The Panel recommends that the Council complete the development and implementation of its workforce and succession plan to underpin future delivery and organisational resilience. The emphasis is on: • Ensuring the Council has the skills and capabilities required for future challenges; • Addressing identified workforce gaps; • Supporting leadership development and retention of critical knowledge; • Strengthening organisational capacity to deliver its priorities. Workforce planning is essential to sustaining improvement, reducing single points of failure, and supporting innovation.	The Council accepts this recommendation and will implement the following response. <u>Context</u> We established a commitment to embed workforce planning across the organisation in the People Strategy and accompanying action plan approved by Cabinet in June 2024. The actions relating to workforce development were scheduled to commence once other building blocks has been put in place. These include: developing and launching a new employee review and development scheme, producing a training needs analysis conducted and establishing a training budget. With these now in place, or in the process of being rolled out, work has commenced on workforce planning, which is being taken forward under the banner of Future Focused Workforce. <u>Actions</u> • Run a development session for managers on succession planning with the LGA • Upskill HR Business Partners in strategic workforce planning' • Produce a workforce development plan to sit underneath the People Strategy to provide clarity on the steps that need to be taken to ensure a future focused workforce	Chief Officer – People, Performance and Partnerships. December 2026 Short Term: now – September 2026

		• Implement the workforce of the future through expanding talent entry points, including work experience, apprenticeships, traineeships and graduate opportunities • Develop a training pathway for all job roles to ensure existing staff are developed to maximise their capability • Undertake research to understand the future skill requirements across the authority and develop or commission training to future proof our workforce <u>FPOP linkage</u> Workforce and succession planning will be treated as a core organisational readiness enabler within the FPOP change portfolio, supporting delivery capacity, reducing single points of failure and strengthening the Council's ability to deliver its priorities. Progress will be tracked through the same programme reporting discipline.	Medium Term: October 2026 – March 2027
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