

Monmouthshire Scrutiny

Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee ~ Feedback to Cabinet of Meeting held on 9th June 2026

Report Item 6: Building the Foundations for Data and AI Enabled Public Services – Scrutiny of the Business Case

Key Issues raised by the Committee:

- Are we being sufficiently ambitious and fast enough in adopting AI, or is a three-year “foundations” approach too slow?

Response: Peter Davies said the programme is front-loaded, with early investment and external support to build pace and internal capability. Councillor Brocklesby added that progress must be fast but properly governed, with strong foundations to avoid fragmented or harmful implementation. Paul Jefford (SRS) said year one will focus on core guardrails such as access controls, governance and data structure, enabling faster, scalable rollout later. He also noted that more than 160 potential use cases have already been identified, showing readiness to move quickly once the foundations are in place.

- Is caution and governance slowing progress unnecessarily?

Response: Councillor Brocklesby said governance is essential to keep AI human-centred and aligned with council values, enabling pace with safeguards rather than delay. Paul added that governance is an enabler, ensuring the right data access so solutions can be audited and scaled safely across services.

- Will the programme deliver tangible, real-world impacts quickly?

Response: Councillor Brocklesby said progress will be rapid, with early use cases such as single view of the child, homelessness and debt showing practical and preventative benefits. Paul added that benefits are expected internally and externally, including less staff time spent searching data, better decision-making, and customer-facing tools such as chatbots handling routine enquiries so staff can focus on complex cases.

- How many of the 160 identified use cases will be prioritised initially?

Response: Paul advised that initial focus will be on shared priorities (e.g. AI front door, single view of the child), plus around three additional use cases per authority in year one, agreed collectively.

- How will you balance customer-facing improvements vs internal productivity tools?

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Response: Both will be progressed in parallel - customer-facing AI (e.g. chatbots) and internal tools (e.g. HR bots, document handling) as part of the same programme.

- What is meant by AI bias and how will it be managed?

Response: Bias can arise from large language models using inaccurate or unverified data; mitigation includes using controlled/internal data sources, approved models, and ongoing review processes.

- How will ongoing evaluation and value for money be ensured?

Response: Peter advised that this will be achieved through stage-gated delivery, governance structures, and benefit/value frameworks, with continuous monitoring and scrutiny.

- How will environmental impacts of AI be mitigated?

Response: Paul replied that the use of cloud infrastructure (AWS) improves efficiency vs local servers, with scalable usage, reduced waste, and provider commitments to net zero helping to manage carbon impact.

- How will reserve funding be used and what proportion is allocated?

Response: Councillor Brocklesby responded that it would come from earmarked "invest to redesign" reserves, used to support delivery and capacity where needed. Peter added that a one-off drawdown (approx. £851k) from reserves (around £1.2m in that reserve) will fund the programme, positioned as an investment to enable service redesign and future efficiency gains, rather than ongoing spend.

- How will the council balance AI benefits with concerns about environmental impact (e.g. solar/wind infrastructure)?

Response: Councillor Brocklesby stated that the council will work in partnership (e.g. Cardiff Capital Region), favour brownfield data centre sites, and align with wider governance to ensure a sustainable, collaborative approach rather than local standalone infrastructure.

- How can evaluation and impact be effectively monitored over time?

Response: Councillor Brocklesby replied that a "double feedback loop" approach will be used with continuous operational feedback plus formal governance checkpoints (e.g. SRS board, gateway reviews, scrutiny) to assess outcomes, capability, and value.

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- How are confidentiality and data protection maintained with a “single view of the child”?

Response: Paul advised that this would be provided through role-based access control (RBAC), ensuring staff only access data they are authorised to see, consistent with current permissions.

- How is the tension between transparency and confidentiality resolved?

Response: Peter said transparency works within controlled access, improving decisions without compromising confidentiality. He added that it means better access for authorised users only, on a strict need-to-know basis. Councillor Brocklesby emphasised a citizen-centred approach, with data use aligned to individual rights and permissions.

- Could Monmouthshire host its own or a collaborative data centre (e.g. using local resources such as water supply)?

Response: Peter advised that the current approach favours cloud solutions (e.g. AWS) as the most efficient; adding that the suggestion is not dismissed and will be explored further.

- How secure is a single access point compared to multiple systems in terms of risk of breach?

Response: Paul advised that security is maintained through role-based access controls and testing, ensuring only authorised users can access relevant data within a controlled system. Matt Gatehouse emphasised the importance of skills, capability, and responsible use by staff, alongside system safeguards.

- How will success and return on investment be measured over time?

- Response: Peter said this will be measured through stage-gates and a benefits framework, assessing financial efficiencies and service outcomes before further investment is released. Councillor Brocklesby added that this will also include social and environmental outcomes, particularly productivity and early intervention benefits.

- Can the programme be adapted if priorities change or benefits are not realised?

Response: Peter Davies stated that yes, adaptations can be made, the delivery is phased and flexible, with governance points allowing adjustment of priorities and use cases.

- How will staff concerns about job security be addressed?

Response: Peter said the programme is intended to augment, not replace, staff, supported by skills investment, communication and support. Matt added that engagement, training

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and workforce planning will continue, with changes managed through natural turnover and union dialogue.

- Can AI-generated risk flags (e.g. for safeguarding) be relied on without inappropriate influence on decisions?

Response: Paul advised that AI outputs are advisory only, supporting professionals by surfacing patterns; decisions remain with qualified staff, supported by governance and safeguards. Peter reinforced that human decision-making is retained at all times, with AI providing insight not judgement.

- Has a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) been completed and will it be shared?

Response:

Peter responded that impact assessments are built into the governance process for each use case.

- How is the programme aligned with national Welsh frameworks (e.g. WLGA, Data Cymru, DISC)?

Response: Councillor Brocklesby advised that the council is actively engaged in national governance structures (WLGA, Data Cymru, national boards), ensuring alignment and coordination rather than fragmentation. Peter added that the council is sharing learning with other authorities and sectors, ensuring consistency and adoption of best practice.

- What safeguards ensure AI does not introduce bias or errors into sensitive decisions?

Response: Paul advised that the use of controlled data sources, approved models, and ongoing testing/monitoring will ensure this, with human oversight always retained. Peter added that bias and fairness are explicit risks managed through governance, evaluation, and structured rollout.

Chair's Conclusion:

The Chair concluded this was a highly significant and worthwhile discussion, providing a "seminal moment" for the council in shaping future service delivery. He emphasised the need to align expectations with the primary drivers of the investment and confirmed that the committee would revisit and monitor this area closely as it develops.

Points requiring a further response by the Cabinet Member:

None required.