

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of People Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr USK
on Thursday, 18th June, 2026 at 10.00 am

Councillors Present

County Councillor Jackie Strong (Chair)
County Councillor John Crook (Vice Chair)

County Councillors: Jan Butler,
Christopher Edwards, Martyn Groucutt,
Simon Howarth, Penny Jones, Maureen Powell,
Maria Stevens, Jill Bond, Alistair Neill,
Peter Strong, Angela Sandles and Laura Wright

Officers in Attendance

Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer
Sharon Randall-Smith, Head of Achievement and
Attainment
Pennie Walker, Equality & Welsh Language
Manager
Nia Roberts, Welsh Language Officer

1. Apologies for Absence

Rachel Buckler and Clare Werrett.

2. Declarations of Interest

None.

3. Public Open Forum

A written question from a member of the public was received and read:

"I am a Monmouthshire resident and am writing ahead of the Strategic Equality Plan meeting on 18th June. The report boasts about the success of the Let's Talk Monmouthshire digital platform launched in January 2025. However, the council's Strategic Equality Plan 2024–28 explicitly noted in its appendix that during initial consultations, residents did express clear concerns regarding gender identity and stressed the importance of *differentiating between sex and gender*. These concerns appear to have been sidelined in the final implementation.

I have a question arising as a result of this. The committee report highlights that 14,165 contributions were received to the Let's Talk Monmouthshire portal. During the foundational consultation for this plan, constituents raised clear objections to the blurring of sex and gender. Where in this annual monitoring report can women see that their feedback regarding the preservation of single-sex services has been listened to and acted upon?" – **ACTION: to provide a written response.**

4. WESP (Welsh in Education Strategic Plan) - To scrutinise performance against the plans

Sharon Randall-Smith introduced the report and answered the members' questions with Cabinet Member Laura Wright:

- *Is it compulsory for all ALN children, including those in specialist resource base (SRB) areas, to learn Welsh?*

It depends on the individual pupil. For children with additional learning needs, their Individual Development Plan sets out whether they should learn Welsh, as the curriculum is tailored to their needs. The authority must consider provision for all learners, but participation in Welsh language learning is determined by what is appropriate for each child.

- *Is there sufficient appropriate support for Welsh medium learners with additional learning needs, and are they more likely to leave Welsh medium education at transition?*

There is sufficient and appropriate support available within Welsh medium schools, identified through regular reviews under the ALN framework. A Welsh-speaking member of the inclusion team supports these schools, and additional specialist support can be sourced from other authorities if needed, although this has not been required to date. While transition rates from primary to secondary Welsh medium education have been lower than desired in some areas, targeted work – such as strengthened links between schools, increased engagement, and additional support for pupils – has been undertaken to improve these rates, and there is optimism that they will increase over time.

- *What role does Coleg Gwent play in supporting Welsh medium education?*

Coleg Gwent is a partner represented on the Welsh in Education Forum and supports post-16 learners, particularly those who do not remain in local sixth forms. It offers a range of courses and helps track pupil progress, ensuring learners can continue developing their Welsh language skills and maintain opportunities as they enter the workforce.

- *Without a dedicated Welsh medium secondary school, will transition rates ever align with primary numbers, and how effective is current secondary provision?*

Transition rates are variable and have not always matched primary uptake, though there are improvements in some areas. Current provision, including collaborative arrangements and pilot initiatives, has enabled increased participation at AS and A level and allowed pupils to access expertise across schools. This approach has shown early success and is helping to sustain Welsh language learning beyond GCSE.

- *What progress has been made towards establishing full-time Welsh medium secondary provision?*

There is currently sufficient capacity in existing secondary provision for the short to medium term. However, discussions are ongoing with neighbouring authorities to

explore partnership models, as pupil numbers within the county alone may not yet justify a standalone Welsh medium secondary school.

- *Will the planned restoration of 'Ti a Fi' provision at the Deri View site proceed?*

Work is ongoing with relevant partners to restore TFE provision at the site, and while there is no specific update provided, there is confidence that it will be delivered as it is important for supporting the growth of Welsh medium education.

- *How feasible is it to maintain surplus places in Welsh medium schools given wider budget pressures?*

Some surplus places are expected when expanding Welsh medium provision, as new or growing schools take time to fill. Overall trends show increasing enrolment in Welsh medium education, with younger year groups filling more quickly. These places are expected to be taken up over time, and the situation differs from English medium schools where pupil numbers are declining.

- *What provision exists for educational psychology support through the medium of Welsh?*

There is currently limited need for Welsh-medium educational psychology support. Where required, the authority can access Welsh-speaking educational psychologists from other authorities, but this has not been necessary so far.

- *What are the financial implications of late immersion provision, given it is grant-dependent and may create additional revenue pressures, and when does the current grant expire?*

The Welsh grant funding for late immersion has been in place for a number of years but has remained largely static. Previously, it was sufficient to cover the full cost when provision was limited to one class, but as provision has expanded across multiple schools, additional funding has been required. The grant is now part of a wider funding arrangement, still ring-fenced for this purpose, but the local authority is supplementing it to sustain and grow the provision. Future delivery models – such as sharing resources, transport arrangements, or peripatetic provision – are currently under discussion with school leaders to ensure the service remains viable as more schools come on board.

- *How does the authority engage home educated children with the Welsh language, and is there any monitoring or encouragement of Welsh learning for these pupils?*

Elective home education is not classified as school provision, so the authority cannot dictate the curriculum or require Welsh language learning. Responsibility for the curriculum sits with parents, although the authority ensures that the education provided is appropriate. There is an officer who works closely with families, and where parents express interest, they are signposted to Welsh language resources such as online courses. Additionally, during engagement days with families, opportunities are taken to promote the Welsh language, although participation remains voluntary and cannot be mandated.

- *How many bilingual teachers are there in Monmouthshire primary schools, and what support is available for staff who want to learn Welsh?*

There is no definitive figure for fully bilingual teachers, as not all staff formally report this. However, data in the WESP report shows increasing confidence levels in Welsh among teachers year on year. A wide range of professional learning opportunities is available, including Welsh Government-funded sabbatical schemes that cover training and staff backfill costs. Additional free courses and training are also available, and schools benefit from staff who return from training and share their expertise, meaning there is no financial burden on schools for staff development in Welsh.

- *Would it be possible to receive data in the future to monitor Welsh medium numbers and trends, so that progress and funding risks can be kept under review?*

The data is already reported annually through the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) report, which is presented each year. This allows the committee to monitor trends over time. It was also noted that current data shows progress against targets, with measurable increases in uptake, and this information will continue to be updated in future annual reports.

Chair's Summary:

Thank you to the Cabinet Member and officers. The committee will schedule future updates on this in its work programme.

5. Welsh Language - To scrutinise the Council's progress in delivery of the Welsh Language objectives 2025-2026

Cabinet Member Angela Sandles and Nia Roberts introduced the report and answered the members' questions:

- *What challenges are faced in promoting the Welsh language in a county like Monmouthshire, particularly given its older demographic, and is it harder to engage older generations compared to younger ones?*

It can present challenges, particularly as traditional promotion methods such as social media and online platforms may be less effective for older generations. However, it is emphasised that it is never too late to learn Welsh, and there are many opportunities available. To address this, the Council is increasingly focusing on community-based activities and events – such as inviting residents into County Hall for St David's Day celebrations – to engage a wider range of people and make Welsh language learning and use more accessible across all age groups.

- *What are the key challenges anticipated in progressing the Welsh Language objectives over the next year?*

One of the main challenges is increasing the number of staff able to speak Welsh, as higher capacity is needed both to meet demand for services and ensure compliance

with Welsh language standards. While there has been a significant increase in staff learning Welsh since the start of the strategy, there has been a slight decrease in participation this year, and further growth is needed. Another key challenge is managing translation services, where rising demand and budget pressures are prompting a review of delivery models, including exploring collaboration with other authorities and improving internal processes to ensure efficiency while maintaining quality.

- *Is there any specific provision of Welsh language courses for councillors, and will councillors be informed about these opportunities?*

Welsh language courses available to staff are also available to councillors, fully funded and typically starting around September. Councillors will be contacted directly with details about these courses. In addition, guidance materials and practical resources – such as commonly used Welsh phrases for meetings and supporting recordings – are being developed to help councillors use Welsh more confidently in the chamber.

- *Is artificial intelligence being used to support translation, and how effective is it?*

AI can be a useful tool for translation, but only where the user has sufficient Welsh language skills to check and verify the accuracy of the output. At present, the authority continues to rely on external translators, as AI is not yet considered reliable enough to be used independently without human oversight.

- *How is Welsh language promoted and perceived within schools, particularly in areas with historically low usage, and what progress has been made?*

There are clear signs of progress, with increased promotion and integration of Welsh language and culture even in English-medium schools and areas with historically low usage. Examples include participation in national events such as the Eisteddfod, increased visibility of Welsh within school environments, and the regular use of incidental Welsh. These developments demonstrate growing engagement among pupils and parents and reflect wider improvements in the promotion and uptake of Welsh language across the county.

Chair's Summary:

The chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for their work and advised that future reports would be added to the committee's work programme. There were no outstanding queries.

6. Strategic Equality Plan 2025-26 - To scrutinise the council's progress in delivering the Strategic Equality Objectives for the year 2025-2026

Cabinet Member Angela Sandles and Pennie Walker introduced the report and answered the members' questions with Matthew Gatehouse:

- *Is the trauma-informed approach to reducing school absence being extended to include social and emotional learning for all pupils, not just those already identified as having issues?*

A written response will be provided to confirm this. It is understood that the data may already cover all pupils, but this will be checked and clarified. – **ACTION: to receive a written response**

- *What more can be done to improve apprenticeships, work experience opportunities, and support for young people aged 16–24 who are not in employment, education, or training (NEET)?*

There is significant work underway to expand opportunities, including a new work experience programme bringing pupils into the Council, support with CV writing and interview skills, and a stronger focus on apprenticeships. All relevant roles are now reviewed to assess whether they can be offered as apprenticeships, with oversight at senior level. Broader workforce planning and new initiatives – such as digital career exploration tools – are also being developed to promote career pathways and address the wider national challenge.

- *What further action can be taken to address the gender pay gap, particularly where it relates to differences between job roles (for example, valuing care roles compared to other occupations)?*

Work is ongoing to address structural and cultural factors contributing to the gender pay gap, including encouraging women into higher-paid and senior roles through training and development. A formal job evaluation scheme is in place to ensure that roles of equal value are paid equally, with independent assessment and trade union involvement to maintain transparency. While progress has been made, further work is needed through workforce planning, skills development, and broader societal change.

- *What is meant by SMEs, and how will the Council rebuild and grow the number of disability confident employers, particularly among local businesses?*

SMEs refers to small and medium-sized enterprises, classified by the number of employees. The Council's employability team is working with the Department for Work and Pensions on a new programme that actively engages local businesses, particularly smaller ones, by meeting them directly, explaining the disability confident scheme, and encouraging them to join at entry level. This targeted engagement is intended to increase the number of participating organisations over time.

- *How are larger businesses being engaged in the disability confident scheme, and how is business size categorised?*

Business size is generally determined by the number of employees. Larger organisations are already more represented within the scheme, including the Council itself, which is the largest local employer. The current focus is on expanding participation among smaller businesses, although engagement with larger employers continues. The scheme is not primarily about cost but about creating supportive workplaces for people with disabilities – whether physical or mental – by promoting inclusive practices such as flexible working and a supportive environment, helping make organisations more accessible and attractive to potential employees.

- *Do grant funding opportunities to support the diversification of rural businesses apply to farming communities, and can examples be provided?*

The diversification of rural businesses is intended to include the farming community and support them in adapting and sustaining their operations in different ways. However, specific examples of supported projects were not available during the meeting, and a written response will be provided with further detail. – **ACTION: to receive a written response**

- *Is the timetable for the RLDP (Replacement Local Development Plan) examination up to date?*

It was acknowledged that the timetable referenced in the report was no longer accurate, as the examination had been postponed. This will need to be corrected in the report.

- *Is it correct that the council is required to provide additional facilities such as fully enclosed, gender-neutral toilets following the Supreme Court ruling and EHRC guidance?*

It was clarified that this is not a legal requirement. While the guidance suggests that providing facilities such as fully enclosed, gender-neutral toilets may be a sensible and proportionate approach to ensure access and avoid discrimination, it is not mandated by law. There is no expectation being placed on businesses or organisations to make such changes, and decisions should be based on what is appropriate in each individual context.

- *What efforts are being made to ensure that people who are not digitally included can participate in consultations such as “Let’s Talk Monmouthshire”?*

In addition to the online platform, the Council provides alternative ways for people to engage, including an in-person “Let’s Talk Monmouthshire” forum held at different locations across the county. Paper copies of consultations are available in libraries, and residents can receive assistance via contact centres to complete forms. The Council is also open to further suggestions to improve accessibility and inclusion.

- *Is there an opportunity for councillors to receive training on the social model of disability?*

Training on the social model of disability is already available through the Council’s online learning platform, although it can be difficult to locate due to the volume of content. Work is underway to improve accessibility for members by creating a more tailored portal highlighting relevant training, including this topic.

- *Can the Council require or encourage its contractors to adopt inclusive practices, such as becoming disability confident employers?*

The Council can include certain requirements or expectations within contracts, subject to advice from procurement colleagues to ensure they are proportionate and do not deter competition. In practice, the Council seeks to encourage inclusive practices

through socially responsible procurement, including requiring social benefits – such as training opportunities or community support – as part of larger contracts.

- *Is there any funding available to support upgrading public conveniences in Goytre, including improving accessibility and provision?*

There is no identified specific funding pot dedicated to public conveniences. However, the Council is currently reviewing its toilet strategy, and while a direct funding source is not confirmed, officers will explore whether there are alternative funding routes or ways to link the request to relevant funding streams. The importance of such facilities for communities and visitors was acknowledged, and further advice will be sought from the appropriate teams. **Action: to provide a response to the member.**

Chair's Summary:

The chair thanked the Members for their questions and the Cabinet Member and officers for their report and responses and confirmed that responses would be sought outside the meeting for the actions highlighted.

7. People Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme and Action List

The committee discussed and agreed a number of updates and additions to its forward work programme.

A site visit to Tudor Street, Abergavenny, previously agreed at an earlier meeting, would be arranged over the summer outside the formal committee schedule.

The next meeting on 14th July would focus on homelessness.

Councillor Howarth requested that a future report be tabled on Domiciliary Care services in the north of the county. He also requested the Housing Allocations Policy and the Rural Allocations Policy be added to the work programme.

Members requested an update on age-friendly communities, reflecting the following themes discussed earlier in the meeting:

- **Digital inclusion and access to consultation** – ensuring residents who are not digitally included can still take part through in-person forums, paper copies in libraries, and contact centre support.
- **Engaging older residents in Welsh language promotion** – recognising that online/social media approaches may be less effective for older generations, with more emphasis on community-based activities and accessible events.
- **Accessible public conveniences** – discussion about upgrading facilities in Goytre, including accessibility and provision, and the wider review of the toilet strategy.

- **Accessible and inclusive services** – wider discussion of disability confident employers, social model of disability training, and inclusive procurement, all relevant to creating supportive communities for people as they age.

8. Council and Cabinet Forward Work Planner

Noted.

9. To approve the minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes were approved, proposed by Councillor Crook and seconded by Councillor Stevens.

10. Next Meeting

14th July 2026 at 10.00am.

The meeting ended at 11.58 am.

This page is intentionally left blank