

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of People Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Tuesday, 14th July, 2026 at 10.00 am

Councillors Present

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

County Councillors: Christopher Edwards,
Martyn Groucutt, Penny Jones, Maureen Powell,
Maria Stevens and Sue Riley (Substitute)

Also in attendance County Councillors:

APOLOGIES: Councillors Jan Butler, Simon Howarth (Sent Substitute)

Officers in Attendance

Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer

1. Declarations of Interest.

2. Public Open Forum.

3. Homelessness Update - To scrutinise the progress in preventing homelessness.

Cabinet Member Sara Burch introduced the report, highlighting significant progress in preventing homelessness in Monmouthshire. She recognised the work of the homelessness team and explained that improvement had been achieved through steady, incremental change. Key successes included the effective elimination of bed and breakfast use, improved temporary accommodation through leased, individual, Severn View and purchased properties, a better geographical spread of accommodation, financial savings, and stronger prevention work which helps people remain housed where they approach the service early.

Looking ahead, priorities include increasing affordable housing supply, reducing time spent in temporary accommodation, retendering housing-related support services with a stronger focus on outcomes, expanding supported housing for people with complex needs, improving integration with health and other services, and strengthening work with children's services to prevent young people and care-experienced young people entering the homelessness system. Councillor Burch also highlighted forthcoming legislation which will make homelessness prevention a shared responsibility across public services, and concluded that Monmouthshire is well placed to implement the changes.

Ian Bakewell delivered a presentation and answered the members' questions with the Cabinet Member and Rebecca Cresswell:

Why are people spending too long in temporary accommodation?

People are spending too long in temporary accommodation for two main reasons. Firstly, many households have support needs and we do not always have the right type of accommodation available to meet those needs. Secondly, there are not enough social housing vacancies

becoming available and we are not yet delivering new social housing at the volume required to meet demand.

What are we doing to address the delays in moving people from temporary accommodation into permanent housing?

We are working to increase the delivery of social housing by unblocking the development pipeline and progressing sites that have already been identified. Our focus is on increasing the supply of affordable housing so that people can move more quickly from temporary accommodation into permanent homes.

Has the delay to the Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP) affected this situation?

Yes. Delays to the RLDP put the future housing pipeline at risk because they can slow the identification and delivery of housing sites needed to provide additional homes. This could affect our ability to increase housing supply and reduce the time people spend in temporary accommodation.

Do you have problems when people are offered accommodation in a different area and do not want to move because their family, friends and support networks are elsewhere? How do you deal with that?

Yes, this is an ongoing challenge. Ideally, we would be able to provide accommodation in the exact area that a person wants to live, particularly as many applicants rely on local support networks such as family, friends and other agencies. However, because of the availability of accommodation across the county, it is sometimes necessary to place people in temporary accommodation outside their home area. When this happens, we try to help them move back to their preferred area as soon as possible.

What impact does this have on families and communities?

We are very conscious of the impact that relocating people can have, particularly for families. Moving households away from their local area can affect established support networks and, in the case of families, can potentially disrupt children's schooling. This is one reason why we are working to address the imbalance in temporary accommodation provision across the county and improve the geographical spread of available accommodation.

Can this issue ever be completely resolved?

It is unlikely that accommodation provision will ever be perfectly matched to demand because it is impossible to predict where the next homelessness presentation will occur. However, we remain mindful of the need to minimise displacement and to provide accommodation as close as possible to people's home communities.

Can we ensure that the future scrutiny of the new homelessness legislation includes input from care-experienced young people?

The intention is to bring a report on the new homelessness legislation to scrutiny in the autumn. Work is already underway, particularly around young people and the prevention agenda, and there will be opportunities to consider how the experiences and views of young people can inform that work.

Is there any joint commissioning with health services to help address the complex health needs of people experiencing homelessness? It seems that frontline housing staff are being asked to support needs that are fundamentally health-related.

There is no formal joint commissioning arrangement with health services at present, but relationships and joint working with health partners have been strengthened.

One example is the partnership at Severn View with the Health Inclusion Service, which supports groups that can find it difficult to access mainstream health services. The service is present at Severn View on a regular basis and also undertakes outreach work, helping to create stronger links between housing and health support. In addition, discussions are taking place with a homeless-friendly GP practice in Chepstow, which receives additional funding to support people experiencing homelessness. These discussions are exploring whether a more joined-up approach linked to Severn View can be developed. The housing service has also been working with the Chief Officer for Social Care, Health and Safeguarding to identify other parts of the health system that could become involved. The focus is on ensuring that people with high and complex needs receive the specialist wraparound support they require, recognising that housing services alone cannot meet all of those needs.

Why is strengthening links with health services so important?

Many people experiencing homelessness have significant physical and mental health needs, and some require specialist support that housing services are not equipped to provide. Stronger involvement from health services is therefore essential to provide the comprehensive, multi-agency support needed to help people sustain their accommodation and improve their wellbeing.

How confident are we that the reduction in homelessness applications reflects a genuine reduction in homelessness, rather than changes in reporting, eligibility criteria or recording practices?

We are reasonably confident that the reduction is genuine because homelessness applications have been declining consistently over a number of years, creating an established trend. There have been no changes to recording practices or processes during that period. In fact, the service now collects more detailed information than previously, giving officers a better understanding of demand. While it is difficult to predict at what point the decline might level off, the available evidence suggests that applications are genuinely reducing.

How many households return to the council as homeless within 12 to 24 months after homelessness has been successfully prevented?

Repeat homelessness does occur, particularly among some single people who may subsequently lose accommodation and return to the service. Officers were unable to provide a figure during the meeting but agreed to supply the information afterwards. They noted that Welsh Government policy encourages services to continue working with people and provide repeated opportunities to sustain accommodation rather than ending support after an initial problem. Significant effort is made to prevent evictions and maintain tenancies, but in some cases people do present as homeless again at a later date.

When will the proposed Young Persons Housing Group become operational and what outcomes are expected from it during its first year?

The group is still in its early stages and progress has slowed somewhat, but it remains a priority. The work is being driven by forthcoming changes in both housing and social care legislation. During its first year, the aim is to bring housing and social care colleagues together to develop a joint protocol for 16 and 17-year-olds who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, as well as for care leavers. The group will also examine models already operating elsewhere in Wales and consider which approaches could be adopted in Monmouthshire. The expectation is

that plans and ways of working will be developed gradually ahead of the phased implementation of the legislation from 2027.

What is being done to secure a fairer Housing Support Grant settlement for Monmouthshire, rather than simply adapting services to financial constraints?

Lobbying Welsh Government for additional resources is an ongoing and regular activity. Officers participate in a range of established Welsh Government networks covering different aspects of housing and homelessness, where funding pressures and resource requirements are frequently raised. The council consistently highlights the additional resources required to deliver Welsh Government policy ambitions. Officers acknowledged that new legislation and policy changes often bring additional duties, but noted that Welsh Government has generally provided extra funding to support implementation. Discussions continue regarding the resource implications of new expectations, such as providing advice services within prisons, where more personalised assessments would require additional capacity and funding.

What is being done about long-term empty and derelict properties in Monmouthshire, and can they be brought back into use for housing?

There is an established process involving Council Tax, Environmental Health and Housing services to identify and engage with owners of empty properties. The council is notified of empty homes and seeks to work positively with owners to bring them back into use. Alongside this, the Empty Homes Premium has helped reduce the overall number of empty properties. However, some properties remain particularly challenging. While there is an ambition to tackle these more difficult cases, doing so would require additional resources and funding. The current approach therefore focuses primarily on engagement rather than enforcement.

Councillor Sara Burch added that many empty properties are already subject to action, such as probate, redevelopment or sale. She also highlighted a separate issue concerning redundant commercial buildings and sites, noting that Registered Social Landlords are increasingly willing to redevelop more complex sites and that a number of potential projects are expected to come forward. Ian Bakewell also explained that, although the Empty Homes Programme has successfully brought properties back into use, very few have become affordable housing or homelessness accommodation. Most return to the private housing market. He noted that grants for bringing empty homes back into use tend to be taken up for larger, more expensive properties rather than those that would help meet housing need, and that this has been raised with Welsh Government.

Is Severn View permanent accommodation or temporary accommodation, and how long do people stay there?

Severn View is temporary accommodation. People can remain there for as long as they need to, but the aim is always to help them move on into permanent housing as soon as possible. The service works with Registered Social Landlords and support agencies to facilitate those moves. However, some residents have complex needs and require additional time and support before they are ready to move into settled accommodation.

What happened to the spare bedroom project that encouraged people to take in lodgers? Did it help address homelessness?

A project was established several years ago to identify people with spare bedrooms who might be willing to accommodate someone in need of housing. Two part-time staff were employed to engage with residents and promote the scheme. In practice, the project achieved very limited success. Only a very small number of placements were made, although one of those placements proved successful over a longer period. Because the overall level of take-up was so low, the scheme was not continued.

Can councillors put forward examples of long-term empty commercial properties and derelict sites that they believe should be investigated?

Yes. Ian Bakewell advised that councillors could forward details of such properties to him. He also suggested contacting Daniel Fordham, who leads on town centre regeneration and deals with empty properties in town centres. Officers would be interested in receiving details of sites that may have redevelopment potential.

What is being done about residents' concerns that crime and anti-social behaviour in the area may have increased since Severn View opened? What security and monitoring measures are in place, and how are the council and police working together to address concerns?

Severn View replaced a bed and breakfast establishment that had already been housing homeless people in Chepstow, so the opening of Severn View did not introduce a new client group to the area. Rather, around 17 residents were moved from one form of accommodation to another. The service recognises that concerns have been raised and accepts that there have been some incidents and complaints. However, many complaints cannot be directly linked to Severn View residents and often reflect a perception that any anti-social behaviour in the area must be connected to the facility.

A range of measures are in place, including 24-hour security at Severn View, security patrols and CCTV coverage extending beyond the building to the lower part of Regents Way, ongoing support work with residents to address behaviour, community impact and perceptions, and close partnership working with Gwent Police, including information sharing and dealing with concerns as they arise. Officers emphasised that while the housing service has responsibilities for accommodation and support, issues such as criminal behaviour are matters for the police rather than the homelessness service.

What happens when someone in Housing First, Severn View or other homelessness accommodation is evicted? Where do they go and whose responsibility do they become?

Evictions are treated as a last resort. The service tries to balance its legal and moral duties to support vulnerable individuals against its responsibilities to other residents, neighbouring communities and accommodation providers. Considerable efforts are made to prevent evictions, including offering multiple opportunities for individuals to sustain their accommodation and, where possible, moving them to alternative accommodation before an eviction occurs. However, there are occasions when this is not possible.

When someone is evicted the council continues to consider its legal duties on a case-by-case basis. Some individuals unfortunately do go on to sleep rough. They are not abandoned and continue to receive support from outreach and homelessness support services. Decisions to evict are taken partly to protect other residents, neighbours and communities from serious or persistent issues.

What relationship does Monmouthshire have with South Gloucestershire when a tenant needs to move there due to family circumstances and support needs? Can the council help facilitate this?

Monmouthshire does not have any particularly formal or special relationship with South Gloucestershire in this regard, but officers are willing to assist. If details of a specific case are provided, the housing team will engage with South Gloucestershire Council and explore whether the individual's housing and support needs can be better met through a move.

Under the new expectations around providing housing advice in prisons, how is a prisoner's local connection determined?

The new legislation will require housing authorities to provide housing-related advice within secure estates located in their area. However, this does not change the existing local connection rules for homelessness applications. A prisoner will still be assessed against local connection criteria when making a homelessness application. The role of Monmouthshire's housing service within local prisons will primarily be to provide housing advice and guidance. If someone has a local connection elsewhere, they would generally be advised to approach the relevant local authority.

What protections are in place for local communities if prisoners who have committed serious offences, including sexual offences, are released?

Housing advice will be available to all prisoners regardless of the nature of their offence. However, responsibility for managing risks associated with offenders does not rest solely with the housing service. There is an established multi-agency framework involving the police, probation services, local authorities and other relevant agencies. These organisations work together to assess and manage risks posed by offenders and to protect local communities. The housing service forms only one part of that wider safeguarding and risk-management framework.

Are delays in the planning system preventing the delivery of the housing needed for homelessness and social housing, and what is being done to speed things up?

The time taken to bring housing schemes forward is a shared frustration across the council, housing associations and Welsh Government. Officers acknowledged that some developments can take many years to progress from consultation to construction. Work is ongoing to reduce delays and improve coordination between all parties involved. This includes bringing together housing, planning, flood-risk, regeneration and Registered Social Landlord (RSL) colleagues more regularly to resolve issues earlier in the process.

Councillor Sara Burch added that previous work by a Welsh Government Housing Delivery Task Force identified barriers to housing delivery across Wales and made recommendations which are now being implemented. The focus is on ensuring that concerns around flooding, highways, active travel, parking, air quality and environmental impacts are addressed at the design stage so that planning applications can proceed more smoothly. She emphasised that delivering affordable housing is a shared endeavour requiring cooperation between councils, housing associations, contractors and local communities.

How do people who are homeless, rough sleeping or sofa surfing get in touch with the council, and how do you identify people who may not realise they are homeless or know what support is available?

The council recognises that it cannot identify people it does not know about, but it has systems in place to reach vulnerable individuals and encourage early contact. An Assertive Outreach Service, delivered by Pobl Group (formerly referenced in the discussion as the outreach provider), regularly engages with rough sleepers and people who are sofa surfing. Reports of rough sleeping are referred to the service, which will actively seek out and engage with those individuals.

The council has also worked to improve awareness and accessibility by:

- Updating and simplifying the homelessness information on the council website.
- Delivering training and awareness sessions to organisations such as Citizens Advice.
- Providing training to social care staff and other professionals who may come into contact with people at risk of homelessness.

- Encouraging partner organisations to refer people to the Housing Options Team at the earliest sign of housing difficulties, rather than waiting until a crisis occurs.

The overall aim is to promote prevention by ensuring that anyone facing housing difficulties is identified and supported as early as possible.

What messages should the council be promoting to the public regarding homelessness and anti-social behaviour?

The Cabinet Member suggested two key messages: Concerns about anti-social behaviour should be reported to the police, who work closely with the council's community safety teams. And anyone who is insecurely housed, sofa surfing, worried about losing their accommodation, or at risk of homelessness should contact the Housing Options Team or visit a council hub as early as possible, so support can be provided before the situation becomes a crisis.

What is happening with the former nunnery building in Abergavenny, which has stood empty for years and is deteriorating? Could it be brought back into use to help address housing need?

Ian Bakewell acknowledged that this property has been a source of frustration for some time and that he had discussed it with the member on a number of occasions over the years. He explained that there has recently been some renewed progress regarding the site. Housing strategy colleagues are now working with one of the Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to explore a proposal for the building. While details were not provided and the work remains at an early stage, there is now a degree of optimism that the site could move forward. Progress has historically been hindered by a variety of issues, particularly around ownership, but there is now some renewed hope that a viable solution may be found.

Given the property's size and previous use as residential accommodation, could it be an ideal building to help meet housing needs?

Ian agreed that it was a significant property and recognised the long-standing interest in seeing it brought back into use. He indicated that the current discussions with an RSL are intended to explore redevelopment options and that, if successful, this could help unlock the site's potential.

What arrangements are in place to ensure that the concerns of residents living near Severn View continue to be heard and acted upon? Should there be a formal residents' liaison group or community forum?

The service maintains an open-door approach and is always willing to engage with residents and neighbouring businesses. There is already a proactive relationship with at least one local business, with direct communication channels in place to discuss concerns and respond quickly where required.

At present, officers do not believe a formal residents' liaison group is necessary. While communication arrangements remain available, the level of contact and complaints received from residents has been relatively low over the previous six months. The view expressed was that a formal structure would not be proportionate at this stage, although the service remains open to engagement and responsive to any concerns raised.

Ian Bakewell also emphasised that Severn View is the home of 17 residents and that any engagement arrangements need to respect that fact, while still ensuring that the service minimises any impact on neighbours and the wider community.

How is the council monitoring the impact of Severn View on the surrounding neighbourhood?

Severn View has a formal monitoring framework in place. This includes monitoring:

- Residents moving into and out of the accommodation.
- Complaints and incidents.
- Information shared with the police.

Ian Bakewell explained that there had been a noticeable increase in complaints during the period leading up to Christmas, but complaint levels had been relatively low since then. The service continues to monitor issues closely and works with the police where concerns are raised.

What lessons have been learned from operating Severn View and how will those lessons influence future supported accommodation schemes?

Officers said that a great deal had been learned since Severn View opened and that numerous changes had already been made. One significant change was to the management structure. Originally, housing support services and building management functions were overseen separately. This arrangement did not work as effectively as intended, so a more unified management structure was introduced.

A range of other operational improvements have also been made, including:

- Changes to security arrangements.
- Refinements to complaint-handling processes.
- Adjustments to day-to-day procedures as lessons have been learned.

The wider vision for Severn View has also evolved. The intention is not simply to provide accommodation but to create a supportive environment with meaningful activities and opportunities for residents. Examples include:

- Cooking, literacy and numeracy activities previously delivered through the Multiply project.
- Regular resident meetings.
- Partnership working with the Health Inclusion Service.
- Planned involvement from community development organisations.
- Exploration of a gardening project and other therapeutic activities.

While some of these initiatives have proved more difficult to establish than anticipated, officers remain committed to developing them further.

What has been learned about the location and suitability of Severn View as a model for future accommodation?

Ian Bakewell said that Severn View is the best homelessness accommodation resource he has worked with in Monmouthshire because of its size, design and town-centre location. However, he noted that questions about location are always subjective. His view was that wherever homelessness accommodation is located there are likely to be concerns and objections from some parts of the community. The key challenge is balancing those concerns with the council's legal and moral responsibilities to provide accommodation and support for people experiencing homelessness.

The main lesson learned is that the council must continue to refine how accommodation is managed and supported, while recognising that there is unlikely ever to be a location that attracts no local concerns.

Are residents' concerns dealt with on an ad hoc basis, or is there a more proactive approach?

Ian Bakewell clarified that both approaches are used. There are proactive arrangements in place with certain nearby businesses, involving regular communication and direct contact points. For residents more generally, engagement tends to be reactive, responding when concerns are raised. However, he stressed that complaints and concerns are not dismissed, and that communication channels remain open. Given the relatively low volume of concerns received in recent months, he did not feel that more formal arrangements were currently justified.

Given the increasing complexity of cases, the remodelling of accommodation, new responsibilities such as providing advice in prisons, and the six priorities set out in the report, is this too much for the service to take on? Would it be better to do less in order to achieve more?

Ian Bakewell acknowledged that capacity pressures are a regular challenge for the service. However, he explained that much of the work programme is driven by Welsh Government policy and legislation, and the different parts of the homelessness system are highly interconnected. He noted that it is difficult to focus on only one part of the system because changes in one area inevitably affect another. Ignoring a particular issue can create blockages elsewhere, which then have consequences throughout the homelessness pathway. As a result, the various priorities cannot easily be separated from one another.

How is the service managing the workload associated with these priorities?

Ian explained that the service has been well supported by the council in recent years and is in a much stronger position than it was five or six years ago. Staffing levels have approximately doubled across the service, which has significantly increased its capacity to deliver work and respond to challenges. He highlighted the creation of specialist posts, including Rebecca Cresswell's Strategic Homelessness Transformation Coordinator role, as an example of the additional resources that have enabled the service to take forward strategic and legislative work alongside its day-to-day responsibilities.

Are the staffing resources now sufficient to deliver the priorities set out in the report?

Ian stated that, while no service is ever in a perfect position, he did not feel homelessness services were in a position to complain about the level of support they had received. The additional staffing and investment from both the council and Welsh Government had made a substantial difference, and the team would continue to work through the priorities as effectively as possible.

Could voluntary and community groups be involved in helping to establish a gardening project at Severn View? Might organisations such as Men's Sheds, the Palmer Centre or other local groups be able to support residents and help create something they can take pride in?

Ian Bakewell welcomed the suggestion and agreed that it was worth exploring. He noted that no idea should be dismissed and that the service is keen to consider both gardening projects and other positive activities that could benefit residents. He explained that the service is open to working with external groups and volunteers and is actively looking for opportunities to bring additional activities into Severn View. While the housing team cannot realistically run a gardening project on its own, it would welcome support from community organisations or individuals who could help establish and sustain such an initiative.

Could projects such as gardening improve wellbeing, provide constructive activity and help integrate Severn View into the wider community?

Ian agreed that this was a positive direction of travel. He acknowledged that there is good potential for activities that provide residents with meaningful engagement and a sense of ownership and pride in their surroundings. He also agreed with Councillor Jones's view that initiatives which connect Severn View residents with the wider community are beneficial. As he put it, anything that helps to integrate Severn View into the community is a good thing and is something the service would be pleased to explore further.

Do the children of people who have previously been rehoused by the council later come to the service expecting the same support and assistance? Is there a pattern of homelessness being repeated across generations?

Ian Bakewell said that there are examples of homelessness and housing difficulties occurring across generations within some families. He explained that the issue is not so much about people simply expecting the same service because their parents received support, but rather that some young people grow up in households experiencing significant challenges and instability. He noted that many of the families the service works with have complex and sometimes chaotic circumstances, and young people can become caught up in those situations. This can increase the risk of homelessness later in life.

What is being done to prevent young people from following the same path into homelessness?

Ian explained that this is one of the reasons for the work being developed with children's services, social care and other partners. The aim is to identify young people who may be beginning to show signs of vulnerability or circumstances that could lead to homelessness in the future. The focus is on intervening earlier, providing support before a housing crisis develops, and working with other services to address underlying issues. While housing services would not necessarily provide all of that intervention directly, they are working with partners to ensure young people receive support at an earlier stage and to prevent homelessness before it occurs.

Chair's Summary:

The Chair highlighted that the committee had found the report informative, detailed and useful, despite the technical nature of some of the information. Members had received a comprehensive overview of current performance, the progress made in recent years, and the priorities for future work. The discussion had provided a good understanding of where the service is now, how far it has progressed, and the challenges that remain.

The Chair also asked that officers convey the committee's appreciation to the wider homelessness team, specifically recognising the work of the frontline staff who support people experiencing homelessness on a day-to-day basis, the staff working directly with residents at Severn View, the officers supporting rough sleepers and others at risk of homelessness and the responsiveness of the service when dealing with homelessness cases brought forward by councillors.

4. Council and Cabinet Work Planner.

Noted.

5. People Scrutiny Committee Work Programme and Action List.

- Provide written response on trauma-informed approach to reducing school absence.
- Complete outstanding actions from Strategic Equality Plan scrutiny.
- Arrange site visit to Tudor Street.
- Schedule Youth Service as the sole substantive item for September.
- Confirm date for November special meeting.

- Invite P&O members to relevant November items where appropriate.
- Consider opening the November Domiciliary Care, Day Opportunities and CIW report meeting to all councillors.
- Scrutinise Rural Allocations Policy alongside the wider Housing Allocations Policy Review.
- Confirm date and format for Housing Allocations Policy Review, with a possible special meeting in December.

6. To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting.

The minutes were confirmed.

7. Next Meeting: 22nd September 2026 at 10.00am.

The meeting ended at **12.06 pm**

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