

Monmouthshire Scrutiny

Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee ~ Feedback to Cabinet of Meeting held on 30th June 2026

Report Item 5: Draft Self-Assessment of performance of the Council's Community and Corporate Plan Objectives 2025/26

Key Issues raised by the Committee:

- The Community and Corporate Plan involve a significant amount of work. To what extent does the plan shape the Council's activities and priorities, rather than simply describing what is already happening?

Response: Matt Gatehouse (Chief Officer for People, Performance and Partnerships) advised that the Community and Corporate Plan, approved at the start of the Council term, translates the administration's ambitions into organisational priorities and actions. It guides service delivery but remains flexible, with emerging risks, opportunities, funding and changing priorities reflected through later Council, Cabinet or Single Member decisions.

- Residents tend to judge the Council by visible services such as roads, refuse collection, schools and responsiveness to reported issues. The report uses terms such as "on track" and "good progress", but what objective evidence demonstrates improvements that residents would actually recognise?

Response: Richard Jones (Performance and Data Insight Manager) explained that the assessment uses resident surveys, service-user feedback, scrutiny, inspections, performance data and business plans to balance measurable outcomes with residents' experiences. Matt added that future assessments will focus more on impact, case studies and resident perspectives.

- How does the assessment account for situations where residents may feel services are deteriorating despite the Council assessing performance as good or improving?

Response: Officers advised that performance varies by service and community, with inspection findings, resident surveys and service feedback used to challenge internal views and identify where improvement is needed.

- Which objective has performed least well this year, and what lessons have been learned?

Response: Richard advised that no single objective stood out as the poorest performer, and none had declined since the previous year. Community resilience and capacity were

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identified as areas for development, with the focus on continued improvement across all objectives.

- Is the self-assessment process genuinely valuable, and how can it be improved to achieve better outcomes?

Response: Richard advised that the self-assessment's value lies in evidence gathering, challenge and reflection, helping services identify improvements and inform business planning. Future work will strengthen outcome measures, resident feedback, accessibility, case studies and lived experience evidence.

- There appears to be a risk that a gap develops between how residents see the Council and how the Council sees itself. The self-assessment rates performance as good or very good, while residents often raise concerns. How is that gap addressed? Councillors often hear when services go wrong, so the Council must test whether its self-assessment matches residents' experiences.

Response: Richard confirmed that resident feedback and independent evidence are used to challenge internal views and provide a balanced assessment of achievements and improvement areas.

- The assessment highlights Flying Start as an important contributor to creating a fairer place to live. However, eligibility is largely determined by geography, meaning some families with significant need may not qualify while others with less need do. What can be done to encourage Welsh Government to make Flying Start more flexible and expand provision?

Response: Will McLean (Chief Officer for Children and Young People) advised that Flying Start remains important for supporting families and early years development. As a grant-funded programme, the Council must work within Welsh Government requirements but will continue to advocate for greater reach, recognising its wider benefits for family support and early intervention. Future childcare reforms will remain an area for discussion.

- Warm spaces have been an important initiative during colder periods. Given recent extreme weather, should similar attention be given to "cool spaces" and what opportunities are there to influence Welsh Government policy in this area?

Response: Matt advised that evidence and local data will support discussions with Welsh Government, helping make the case for changes, support programmes and future policy or funding priorities.

- The Food and Farming Strategy promotes use of local food in schools. Can the Council also strengthen links between children and food production, for example through farm visits and greater understanding of local agriculture?

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Response: Craig O'Connor (Chief Officer for Place and Community Well-being) confirmed that a Food Strategy update will be considered shortly. Schools are already involved in initiatives linking pupils with local food production, supported by grant funding and ongoing work with procurement teams and partners to strengthen local food supply chains and education.

- If Welsh Government support becomes available for initiatives that connect schools and farming, how can the Council help promote and make best use of it?

Response: Craig confirmed that officers are continuing to work through the Food Strategy programme and associated partnerships. Future updates will be provided to members through the appropriate member forums. He advised that ongoing work is focused on maximising opportunities created by new grant funding and partnership arrangements.

- The report shows that take-up of Universal Free School Meals has declined from around 75% to 68.6%, against a target of 77%. Why are fewer pupils taking up Universal Free School Meals? This reduction in take-up is quite significant and merits attention. R

Response: Deb Hill-Howells (Chief Officer for Infrastructure) advised that the figure is an average, with take-up varying significantly between schools. Officers are focusing on the lowest-uptake schools and have gathered pupil and parent feedback. Take-up fell after summer-term menu changes, some required to meet Welsh Government healthy eating standards. Feedback has highlighted portion sizes, menu preferences and food waste. A parent survey is underway, and officers are working with catering staff to improve menus while remaining compliant.

- Why has the Council decided not to have a separate Poverty and Inequality Action Plan? How can the Council be confident that all areas identified in the Equality Impact Assessment—including care-experienced people, veterans and other protected groups—are being properly addressed?

Response: Matt clarified that not having a separate poverty and inequality strategy does not reduce the Council's commitment. The Council works through its separately monitored Strategic Equality Plan and mainstreams poverty and inequality considerations across services, including Food and Fun, prevention work and targeted support for disadvantaged communities. He acknowledged veterans were not explicitly referenced but confirmed support remains important, noting the Council's Armed Forces Covenant commitments and Gold Award status.

- The report shows a reduction in free or subsidised play provision. What has caused this reduction and what impact is it having?

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Response: Will advised that the measure relates mainly to the Food and Fun summer provision. As places are free to book, some families reserve but do not attend, making participation appear lower than expected. The programme remains available and continues to provide high-quality activities and meals during school holidays. The issue is attendance and utilisation, not reduced provision.

- The report refers to Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA), ELSA support and other interventions. Are we concentrating too much on reacting to problems rather than helping children develop resilience and coping skills before problems emerge?

Response: Will responded that schools develop resilience, emotional wellbeing and life skills daily through the curriculum and pastoral support. ELSA and EBSA are highlighted because demand for specialist support has increased, but they sit alongside wider preventative work already embedded in mainstream teaching and wellbeing provision.

- Why is the performance measure relating to young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) highlighted as an area of concern when performance has improved?

Response: Will confirmed that the proportion of young people who are NEET has improved since last year, but remains below target. The issue is a significant national challenge and not unique to Monmouthshire. Funding has been secured to continue targeted support, with the Inspire programme now in the core budget so support workers can work directly with young people in schools. The aim is to keep improving outcomes and reduce the number becoming NEET.

- The report presents the NEET measure as a percentage, whereas actual numbers would provide a clearer picture of the scale of the issue. Another example is the measure for care-experienced young people, which shows a target of 60% remaining in education, employment or training. What does that percentage actually represent and is that a high enough target?

Response: Richard agreed that future reports should include actual numbers alongside percentages, noting that the 2.5% NEET rate represented around 20 young people. Jane Rodgers (Chief Officer for Social Care and Safeguarding) explained that small care-experienced cohorts mean individual changes can affect percentages significantly. The Council remains ambitious for education, employment and training outcomes, with pathway planning and personal adviser support provided to each young person.

- Are schools providing enough time and focus to resilience, mindfulness and coping skills given the pressures faced by young people today?

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Response: Will advised that resilience, wellbeing and life skills are embedded across the Curriculum for Wales and daily school life. ELSA, EBSA and other interventions reflect rising demand for specialist support, alongside universal preventative work. Most pupils receive resilience and emotional support through mainstream teaching, with additional interventions available where needed.

- How can the Council gather more low-cost resident feedback, including through contact centre interactions, reporting systems and routine exchanges, to ensure self-assessment reflects public experience?

Response: Matt agreed there are opportunities to make better use of resident feedback. The Council already uses Let's Talk Monmouthshire, the Resident Survey, service-specific feedback, social care and library surveys, and Youth Service engagement. Contact centre and customer systems could provide further insight. The key is ensuring feedback is analysed and used to improve services, inform self-assessment and keep the Council connected to residents' experiences.

- Can the Council make better use of evidence from the Climate Innovation Camp and similar engagement activities to understand young people's priorities and views?

Response: Matt confirmed that engagement across the Council and with partners provides valuable evidence, including young people's voices, service-user feedback, resident surveys and community input. The challenge is capturing these lessons and using them more effectively in service planning and future self-assessments.

- There is some criticism of self-assessment centres on perceptions that the Council is "marking its own homework". Would increasing resident and service-user evidence help demonstrate that assessments are grounded in external experiences rather than solely internal judgement?

Response: Matt acknowledged the importance of external challenge. Resident and service-user feedback, inspections, Panel Performance Assessments and scrutiny help test the Council's conclusions and reduce reliance on internal views.

Chair's Conclusion:

The Chair welcomed the increasing use of resident feedback and independent evidence, emphasising the need to ensure the Council's assessment of its own performance reflects residents' lived experience of services. Resident input, external assessment and scrutiny were recognised as essential to maintaining credibility. The Committee concluded that the self-assessment process should continue to develop so it is more evidence-based, transparent and reflective of residents' experiences before the report proceeds to Governance and Audit Committee and Full Council.

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Points requiring a further response by the Cabinet Member:

None required.