

**SUBJECT: YOUTH SERVICE – SERVICE UPDATE AND ENDORSEMENT OF
MONMOUTHSHIRE 5 YEAR PLAN FOR YOUTH WORK 2027-2032**

MEETING: PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: 22nd September 2026

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: ALL

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To provide the committee with the context for youth work in Wales (paragraphs 10.1, 10.2, 10.3, 10.4 and 10.5).
- 1.2 To provide the committee with the context for youth work in Monmouthshire, looking at the past, present and future, by sharing with the committee:
- the Estyn inspection report of the Youth Service in October 2025 (report published January 2026). (paragraphs 10.6)
 - the Education Workforce Council's The Bronze Quality Mark Assessment Report of the Youth Service in July 2026 (report published September 2026). (paragraphs 10.7)
 - the report from the 2026 Make Your Mark report (report published August 2026). (paragraphs 10.8)
 - the proposed Monmouthshire 5 Year Plan for Youth Work 2027-2032 and accompanying timeline due for submission to Welsh Government on September 30th September 2026 (paragraphs 10.9 and 10.10)

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That members use the documents referred to in section 10 to challenge the Youth Service, in line with the only recommendation from the Estyn report (paragraph 10.6):

Recommendation 1. "Ensure that the youth service is included in formal member-level scrutiny arrangements so that elected members can provide appropriate oversight and challenge"

- 2.2 That members scrutinise the proposed Monmouthshire 5 Year Plan for Youth Work 2027-2032 and offer their endorsement (paragraph 10.10)

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 The Youth Work National Occupational Standards 2019 explains that the purpose of youth work is to: "To enable young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential". (paragraph 10.4)

3.2 Youth work in Wales is underpinned by a core set of principles and purposes (paragraph 10.5) and has a value base which is grounded in respect for young people and in the principles of inclusion and equal opportunity. Through its voluntary relationship with young people, it offers opportunities for learning that are: Educative, Expressive, Participative, Inclusive and Empowering.

3.3 There is a Youth Strategy for Wales (published March 2019) which sets out a shared vision for youth work in Wales. (paragraph 10.3)

3.4 The statutory framework for youth work (published 24th March 2026) directions (paragraph 10.1) and guidance (paragraph 10.2). The framework sets out how each local authority, working with voluntary organisations, and partners that provide services for young persons in the local authority's area must plan and provide a distinct youth work service as part of the wider youth support services they provide to young people. The framework also prescribes new national standards for youth work.

3.5 The Youth Service is the main service delivering youth work in Monmouthshire, and sits in the Children, Learning, Skills and Economy (CLSE) directorate. Through a range of open-access provision (such as youth clubs, youth centres and outreach work) and targeted provision (such as mental health / emotional wellbeing support, support for Welsh speaking young people, support for young people who are LGBTQ+, support for young people who have additional learning needs or are at transition points) 11–25-year-olds are supported.

3.6 Youth Service staff are registered education professionals through the Education Workforce Council (EWC) at two levels: Youth Worker (the same level as teachers) and Youth Support Worker.

3.7 Other youth work happens in Monmouthshire through the council's Employment and Skills Team, the Duke of Edinburgh (D of E) project (which sits in Outdoor Adventure within Leisure Services in the Place & Community Wellbeing directorate), and the Compass project which offers targeted support around youth homelessness (and sits in Housing Services in the Social Care & Safeguarding directorate.)

3.8 Estyn inspects youth work under the Learning and Skills Act (2000) and The Youth and Community Work Education and Training (Inspection) (Wales) Regulations 2006, and:

- ensures that inspection is of high quality and responsive to the needs of all young people 11-25
- ensures that evaluations are secure, reliable, valid and based on first-hand evidence
- involves young people and providers fully in the inspection process, including the opportunity for the provider to select a nominee
- uses the provider's improvement priorities as the starting point for the inspection and to identifies key issues for investigation in order to evaluate the validity of its findings
- includes peer inspectors in the inspection process
- keeps to a minimum any requirements for documentation and preparation by the provider
- gains the young people's, staff (paid and unpaid, part-time and full-time) and stakeholders' perspective, including that of management bodies and trustees.
- applies the principle of equality for Welsh and English to all our inspection work, providing bilingual services whenever they are appropriate

- is constructive in identifying and supporting youth work providers with important aspects or areas that require improvement
(source: [How We Inspect - Youth Work](#))

3.9 In Estyn's report on the Youth Service published January 2026 (paragraph 10.7) the Youth Service was found to make a significant and positive difference to the lives of young people across the county. Inspectors highlighted numerous strengths, including the high quality of relationship-based youth work, the expertise and commitment of staff, and the strong impact the service has on young people's confidence, resilience, wellbeing and personal development. Young people were found to benefit greatly from a wide range of inclusive opportunities, developing important life skills, strengthening their voice in decision-making, and feeling a strong sense of belonging and purpose. Particular strengths included the highly effective Year 6 transition programme, targeted support through initiatives such as the Shift Project, outstanding participation opportunities through the Make Your Mark campaign and youth conferences, and the service's commitment to inclusion for young people with additional learning needs, LGBTQ+ young people, Welsh speakers and those from ethnic minority backgrounds. Inspectors also praised the service's strong partnerships, innovative use of data and self-evaluation, robust safeguarding culture, and clear strategic leadership. The report concluded that the youth service is highly regarded by young people, partners and senior leaders, with its skilled workforce, effective partnerships and ambitious vision empowering young people to thrive, shape their futures and become active citizens within their communities. The only recommendation identified was to strengthen formal elected member scrutiny arrangements, with all other aspects of the service receiving highly positive feedback (paragraph 2.1.)

3.10 The Quality Mark for Youth Work (the Quality Mark) is a national award available to youth work organisations across Wales. A unique tool for self-assessment, it supports and recognises improving standards in the provision, practice, and performance of organisations, demonstrating and celebrating the excellence of their work with young people. Each level is made up of four standards which in turn, have a series of indicators. The indicators have their own measurable criteria or 'grade descriptors' which have been developed to help organisations understand how well they are doing against each of the indicators, and what would be needed to help them move forward. (source: [About the Quality Mark](#))

3.11 The Bronze Quality Mark Assessment for Monmouthshire Youth Service carried out in July 2026 (report published September 2026) (paragraph 10.7) found that Monmouthshire Youth Service demonstrates consistently strong practice across all areas and successfully achieved renewal of the Bronze Quality Mark, with all indicators assessed as Good Practice. The report highlights a number of significant strengths, particularly the service's clear strategic vision, strong culture of continuous improvement, and ability to translate strategic priorities into responsive local provision. Assessors praised the service's excellent understanding of the needs of young people and communities, its extensive partnership working, and its proactive approach to emerging issues. Young people's participation was identified as a significant strength, with young people meaningfully involved in planning, evaluating and shaping both local services and strategic priorities. Relationship-based practice was also highlighted as a key strength, with young people consistently describing positive, trusting relationships with staff that support their confidence,

wellbeing and personal development. The assessment further recognised the service's strong focus on emotional wellbeing, high-quality informal learning opportunities, effective safeguarding culture, and commitment to workforce development through its successful "grow your own" approach to supporting and developing volunteers and future youth workers. Overall, assessors concluded that Monmouthshire Youth Service provides inclusive, responsive and impactful youth work that places young people at the heart of decision-making and service delivery.

3.12 The Youth Service's 2026 Make Your Mark consultation engaged 3,395 young people across Monmouthshire, who voted on the issues most important to them before exploring solutions through a Youth Conference (paragraph 10.8). The consultation identified three key priorities: Employment & Skills, Health & Wellbeing, and Experiences & Opportunities. Across all three themes, young people consistently called for clearer information, better access to opportunities and support, stronger relationships with trusted adults, greater inclusion, and meaningful action on the issues they raise. The report combines ballot findings with the seventeen recommendations from young people for services and provides a framework for partners to work alongside young people to turn their priorities into visible and measurable change.

3.13 Monmouthshire's 2027-2032 Youth Work Strategic Plan has been developed through an evidence-led and young people-led process. The Youth Service began by reviewing existing strategies, plans, and evidence alongside the priorities identified by young people to produce an initial draft of the plan and its objectives. Youth Service staff were then engaged to review and refine the draft, ensuring it reflected operational expertise and local needs. Young people were subsequently consulted on the proposed objectives through accessible youth-friendly materials and direct engagement opportunities, including the annual Youth Service Youth Conference, with their feedback informing further revisions. The draft plan was then shared with partners and Youth Services across the South-East Wales region for consultation, ensuring a collaborative and partnership-based approach. Feedback from both young people and partners has been used throughout the process to shape and strengthen the final strategic plan prior to scrutiny and submission to Welsh Government on 30th September 2026 (paragraph 10.9).

3.14 Monmouthshire's 2027-2032 Youth Work Strategic Plan (paragraph 10.10) sets out a clear vision for developing high-quality, accessible and inclusive youth work over the next five years, fully aligned with the Welsh Government's Youth Support Services (Provision of Youth Work) (Wales) Directions 2026 and the wider ambition of delivering a rights-based, participative and needs-led youth work offer. The plan has been shaped through extensive consultation and collaboration with young people, local authority services, voluntary sector partners and other stakeholders, ensuring that it reflects both local need and national priorities. At its heart is a strong commitment to young people's voice and influence, with evidence gathered through large-scale engagement including Make Your Mark, the Monmouthshire Youth Conference, ongoing participation activities and targeted consultations. The six strategic objectives focus on strengthening participation, improving wellbeing, expanding opportunities and pathways, developing digital youth work, addressing inequalities through targeted support, and investing in a skilled and sustainable workforce. Together, these priorities demonstrate a partnership

approach to delivery, recognising that effective youth work depends on collaboration across agencies and communities, while ensuring that young people remain central to decision-making, service development and the future direction of youth work in Monmouthshire.

4. INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT, (includes equality, future generations, social justice, safeguarding and corporate parenting):

4.1 Please refer to the Integrated Impact Assessment (paragraph 10.11).

4.2 Safeguarding – positives

Youth work has a strong positive safeguarding impact through trained staff, clear procedures, safe environments and trusted relationships that enable early identification of concerns and preventative support for young people.

4.3 Safeguarding – negatives

Demand and case complexity can exceed the capacity of universal youth work services. Some young people may also be reluctant to engage early, reducing the effectiveness of preventative interventions.

4.4 Safeguarding – mitigations

Robust safeguarding procedures, staff training, early intervention and strong partnership working with specialist services ensure appropriate support and clear referral pathways for young people.

4.5 Corporate Parenting – positives

The service provides inclusive youth work opportunities that support care-experienced young people through trusted relationships, participation, wellbeing support and personal development.

4.6 Corporate Parenting – negatives

Care-experienced young people can face additional barriers to engagement, while complex needs and placement instability may affect participation and outcomes.

4.7 Corporate Parenting – mitigations

Targeted engagement, partnership working with social services and carers, flexible delivery and appropriate referrals help reduce barriers and promote inclusion for care-experienced young people.

5. OPTIONS APPRAISAL:

5.1 Options appraisal not relevant in this scenario. We have a duty to prepare a 5-year strategic plan and submit to Welsh Government on 30th September 2026.

6. EVALUATION CRITERIA:

6.1 The Youth Service's service delivery plan is a live document with key milestones for reporting falling quarterly. This service delivery plan was spotlighted by Estyn in their report, who called it "A living plan for lasting impact" and explained how it "acts as a living framework,

continually refreshed each quarter to reflect progress, learning, and changing priorities [and] connects the service's strategic ambitions with day-to-day operations and wider corporate goals, ensuring that every action contributes to the bigger picture.” (paragraph 10.6)

6.2 In the statutory framework for youth work (published 24th March 2026) (paragraph 10.1 and 10.2) each local authority will be responsible for producing a 5-year strategic plan for youth work to commence 1st April 2027. Local authorities must put arrangements in place for monitoring progress against the objectives set out in the strategic plan. This must include consulting with young people in its area at least once each financial year on the extent to which they consider the local authority is meeting its objectives and meeting their needs. Having consulted as above, a local authority must publish a report at least once in each financial year following the publication of the plan, to explain the progress made against the objectives in its plan.

6.3 The Estyn cycle for youth work inspections is every six years, currently set three weeks before the local authority (LGES) inspections.

6.4 Each level of the Quality Mark (Bronze, Silver, Gold) once achieved needs renewing every three years.

7. REASONS:

7.1 To ensure that the Youth Service is included in formal member-level scrutiny arrangements, in accordance with the Estyn recommendation.

7.2 The proposed Monmouthshire 5 Year Plan for Youth Work 2027-2032 is being brought to this committee for scrutiny prior to it being submitted to Welsh Government on 30th September 2026.) Following the submission, Welsh Government will scrutinise the plan with any amendments being made before final sign off and the plan coming into force on 1st April 2027.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

8.1 There are no resource implications specifically associated with this report however realisation of the 5-year plan will incur significant resources to implement the direction proposed within, such as mitigating increased pressure on the Youth Service.

9. CONSULTEES:

- Children, Learning, Skills and Economy Directorate Management Team
- Children, Learning, Skills and Economy Inclusion Team

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

10.1 The Youth Support Services (Provision of Youth Work) (Wales) Directions 2026 - [The Youth Support Services \(Provision of Youth Work\) \(Wales\) Directions 2026](#)

10.2 Youth Work in Wales: Delivering for Young People - Statutory Guidance for Youth Work in Wales - [Youth work in Wales: delivering for young people | GOV.WALES](#)

10.3 Youth Work Strategy for Wales - [The Youth Work Strategy for Wales english](#)

10.4 Youth Work National Occupational Standards 2019 - [Youth Work National Occupational Standards 2019 Introduction](#)

10.5 Youth Work in Wales: Principles and Purposes - [Youth Work in Wales – CWVYS](#)

10.6 Estyn Inspection report of Monmouthshire Youth Service October 2025 (published January 2026) - [Inspection report Monmouthshire Youth 2026](#)

10.7 The Bronze Quality Mark Assessment Report - [Final report due for publication September 2026](#)

10.8 2026 Make Your Mark Report - [2026 Make Your Mark Report.pdf](#)

10.9 Monmouthshire 5 Year Plan for Youth Work 2027-2032 – Timeline - [Monmouthshire 5 Year Plan for Youth Work 2027-2032 - timeline.pdf](#)

10.10 Proposed Monmouthshire 5 Year Plan for Youth Work 2027-2032 - [Monmouthshire's 5-year strategic plan for Youth Work \(final signed\).pdf](#)

10.11 Integrated Impact Assessment - [IIA Form for Youth Service update September 2026.pdf](#)

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