

Monmouthshire Scrutiny

Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee ~ Feedback to Cabinet of Meeting held on 29th September 2026

Report Item: Annual Director's Report for Social Care

Key Issues raised by the Committee:

- The social care budget appears broadly balanced, but this masks a £594k overspend in Children's Services; and a £665k underspend in Adult Services. Can officers assure members that the Adult Services underspend reflects genuine demand management rather than unmet need or staff capacity issues?
- What reduction in external placements and costs is expected from the development of in-house provision? How many children are currently in external placements? Are in-house placements genuinely more cost effective once staffing, property and support costs are included?

Response by Chief Officer Social Care and Safeguarding

The Adult Services position was supported by late Welsh Government grants, particularly the Pathways of Care grant. Funding was used to support hospital discharges, residential placements and care-at-home provision. The underspend did not reflect unmet need and officers were confident services continued to meet demand.

Children's Services continues to reduce reliance on external placements through investment in in-house residential, supported accommodation and fostering provision. At the end of the year there were seven children in Monmouthshire's in-house residential provision; that number had since increased to eight. Four young people were accommodated within supported accommodation provision.

A further residential children's home and supported accommodation provision are planned, increasing capacity further. External placements can cost from approximately £4,000-£4,500 per week up to £15,000-£17,000 per week depending on need. Business cases demonstrate that in-house provision delivers both better value for money and improved outcomes for children.

- The Member welcomed the evidence that in-house provision appears to be benefiting children and young people and asked whether officers wished to add anything further regarding placement provision.

Response by Chief Officer Social Care and Safeguarding

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The Chief Officer highlighted the success of the council's fostering strategy. Increased support and incentives have helped increase the use of Monmouthshire foster carers. For the first time there is now a clear gap between the number of children placed with Monmouthshire foster carers and those placed with independent fostering agencies. This has improved outcomes and generated significant cost savings.

- Given the high cost of external placements, how many in-house residential settings does Monmouthshire now operate? How many external children's homes are operating within the county?

Response by Chief Officer Social Care and Safeguarding

Monmouthshire currently has 3 registered in-house children's homes, with 1 additional residential home due to open. Also we have 1 supported accommodation provision open with 1 further supported accommodation provision due to open this year. A further supported accommodation provision planned for the following year. There are a significant number of external children's homes in the county, although many do not accommodate Monmouthshire children. Many placements are highly competitive and children are often placed outside the county depending on availability and needs. The exact number of external homes and Monmouthshire placements could be provided following the meeting.

- The Chair noted it would be useful to know how many Monmouthshire children are accommodated within county-based external provision, as this would help assess whether children are remaining closer to home while in care.
- What support is available for the 43% of care leavers not in education, employment or training? How many young people does this represent? Given concerns about wellbeing and suicide risk among care leavers, how are these young people being supported?

Response by Chief Officer Social Care and Safeguarding

A significant proportion are unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people who do not yet have the right to work. Others may not yet be ready for employment or education, may be parents themselves, or can be affected by benefit-related issues. Every care leaver has access to a Personal Adviser and support can continue until age 25. The service works to build support networks, peer relationships and ongoing connections to reduce isolation and vulnerability. Officers agreed to provide the actual numbers behind the percentage.

- The complaints table is difficult to understand. What does the outcomes column mean? What learning has come from complaints, particularly around communication, assessments and charging? How is feedback from the social care survey collected and why do only some people receive it?

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- Response by Chief Officer Social Care and Safeguarding

The outcomes column records whether complaint elements were upheld, not upheld or partially upheld by an independent investigator. Some complaints contain multiple strands, making the outcome column complex to present. The report could be made clearer for readers. Learning from complaints is shared through staff discussions, supervision and training. Common themes include communication, financial assessments and helping families understand complex processes. Additional staff training has been provided where recurring issues have been identified.

- A Member requested the criteria used for selecting recipients of the social care survey.

Response by Head of Adult Services and Commissioning

The survey follows a Welsh Government methodology with specific eligibility criteria and exclusions. Approximately one twelfth of people with an active care and support plan receive the survey each month, subject to those criteria. Feedback is gathered continuously throughout the year rather than through a single annual exercise. Anyone with concerns about their care can contact the service directly at any time.

- For care leavers who are unaccompanied asylum seekers and cannot access employment or benefits, what ongoing support is available? Does the council continue to have responsibilities towards them? Is language support a significant barrier that needs to be addressed?

Response by Chief Officer Social Care and Safeguarding

The council retains ongoing responsibilities because these young people continue to be supported as care leavers. Support includes accommodation, access to services, personal adviser support and assistance with their wider needs. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people are connected to language support, legal advice and culturally appropriate services when they arrive. Monmouthshire has built considerable experience in supporting this group and following them through into care leaver status. Support remains available until they reach the end of the care leaver support period.

- Are current vacancy and sickness levels causing concern? What impact are they having on service delivery? Have vacancy and sickness levels improved or worsened?

Response by Chief Officer Social Care and Safeguarding

Vacancy levels average around 30 posts across both Adult and Children's Services. Recruitment has improved over the last 18 months, although some areas remain difficult to recruit to, particularly reablement and child protection social work. Vacancies can affect

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timely service delivery and place additional pressure on existing staff. Where statutory roles must be filled, agency workers are used if necessary. Children's Services staff turnover is around 10%, which officers consider comparatively positive.

In terms of sickness absence, the service is using the council's revised attendance-management approach, focusing on individual support and return-to-work arrangements. Managers receive detailed data on both short and long-term absence to support intervention. Some absence reflects the nature of social care work and the age profile of the workforce. Recruitment, retention and attendance continue to be actively managed rather than accepted as normal.

- What impact will the proposed Gwent-wide Social Care Workforce Development Team have on workforce development and learning within the service?

Response by Chief Officer Social Care and Safeguarding

Learning from complaints and practice issues is delivered locally through supervision, team discussions and management arrangements. The Workforce Development Team's role is to coordinate training programmes, support student placements and manage workforce development grant activity.

- How will local learning and service improvement be maintained if workforce development becomes a regional function?

Response by Chief Officer Social Care and Safeguarding

The proposed regional arrangements would not replace service-based learning and professional supervision. Practice improvement, learning from complaints and staff development will continue to be led within the service through managers and supervision arrangements. The regional team would provide training infrastructure and support, while responsibility for day-to-day professional learning remains local.

- With the proposed move to a Gwent-wide Workforce Development Team, can members be assured that the strong local relationships, training support and social work student development currently provided in Monmouthshire will be maintained? Will support for foster carers and the quality of local training continue?

Response by Chief Officer Social Care and Safeguarding

The Workforce Development Team plays a critical role in student placements, newly qualified social worker support, training delivery and workforce development. A regional model could improve resilience, reduce duplication and strengthen links with universities and training providers. Officers recognise the importance of retaining close links with local

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services and supporting service change. The proposed business-partner approach is intended to ensure Monmouthshire's specific workforce needs continue to be met while benefiting from regional capacity and expertise.

- What does the new START (Short-Term Assessment and Reablement Team) model look like? How is the workforce being trained? How are external care providers being involved so that care plans reflect reablement outcomes?

Response by Head of Adult Services and Commissioning

START has been moved to the beginning of the care pathway so support is provided earlier. Reablement workers have been trained and upskilled to undertake functional assessments. This has increased access to reablement and reduced waiting times for assessments. Staff work closely with social workers to provide proportionate support at the earliest stage. A Trusted Assessor approach is being developed with external care providers to improve information sharing and responsiveness. The overall aim is to create a more outcome-focused and preventative model of care.

Chair's Conclusion:

The Chair thanked officers and the Cabinet Member and all staff for their work supporting vulnerable children, adults and older people across Monmouthshire, highlighting the value of the Director's Report and the way information had been presented accessibly through case studies and infographics. He noted the importance of ensuring reports remain understandable and engaging for residents as well as members and suggested it would be useful in future to explore the potential role of AI and assistive technology within social care, particularly how it might improve outcomes and efficiency. He commented that the nature of members' questions demonstrated how highly valued social care services are and asked that the committee's appreciation be passed on to managers, practitioners and wider staff teams for the work undertaken every day to support residents.

Points requiring a further response by the Cabinet Member:

None.