

Monmouthshire Scrutiny Committee Report: 2025-2026

Report of the Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee: The Effectiveness and Added Value of the Scrutiny undertaken during January 2025 to April 2026

Introduction

This report provides a summary of the work undertaken by the Council's Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee during the 2025 municipal year and up to April 2026. It highlights the Committee's important role in scrutinising the performance of services delivered to residents, holding the Executive and Cabinet Members to account, examining strategic risks and mitigating actions, and providing constructive challenge in relation to revenue, capital and medium-term budget management.

The report is informed by the formal minutes of the Committee's ordinary and special meetings during the reporting period. It summarises the principal matters considered, the challenge provided by members, the assurances received from Cabinet Members and officers, the follow-up actions identified, and the ways in which scrutiny contributed to transparency, accountability and improved decision-making.

Overview of Scrutiny Activity

During the reporting period, the Committee considered a broad and significant range of matters central to the Council's overall performance. These included revenue and capital monitoring, draft budget proposals, medium-term financial planning, strategic risk management, self-assessment, service annual reports, safeguarding, health and safety, complaints, school exclusions, attendance, examination outcomes, children's placements, investment and commercial interests, economy and skills, highways, and specific service reviews.

Throughout this work, members maintained a clear focus on service effectiveness, the adequacy of risk management arrangements, and the robustness, transparency and outcome focus of financial and performance information, while also recognising the commitment of officers and services working in a challenging context.

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Scrutiny by Meeting and Topic

11th February 2025 – Ordinary Meeting

Revenue and Capital Budget Proposals 2025/26

The Committee undertook detailed pre-decision scrutiny of the 2025/26 draft revenue and capital budget proposals. Members tested the realism of savings plans, the impact of council tax increases on residents, the sustainability of school budgets, pressures in social care and housing, and the balance between service protection and financial resilience. In doing so, the Committee provided robust and constructive public challenge, helping to draw out the practical implications of budget choices for residents and services.

Financial Update 3

At the same meeting, the Committee scrutinised the in-year financial position, including overspends in core services, school deficits, debt recovery, housing and homelessness pressures, and the reliance on balancing finance and treasury measures. Members recognised the work being undertaken in difficult circumstances, but also tested whether the position was sustainable. This reinforced financial oversight by ensuring that reported improvements were considered alongside underlying structural pressures.

29 April 2025 – Ordinary Meeting

Key Stage 4 Results

The Committee scrutinised secondary school outcomes, examining what the results meant for learners' life chances, how performance was benchmarked, the position of lower-attaining pupils, the implications of the new curriculum, and how schools and governors used data to support improvement. This moved scrutiny beyond headline results and towards whether performance information was being used effectively to improve outcomes for children and young people.

Development of Children's Placements

Members examined the Council's strategy for developing children's placements, questioning placement costs, market instability, delivery of new provision, reliance on external providers, and the impact on young people. The Committee's challenge helped maintain a clear focus on both improved outcomes and better value in a

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high-cost, volatile service area, while reinforcing the Council's responsibilities as a corporate parent.

3 June 2025 – Special Meeting

Additional Learning Provision and Specialist Resource Bases

The Committee reviewed progress in additional learning provision, including specialist resource bases, out-of-county placements, transport, capacity, and compliance with statutory expectations. Through detailed questioning, members secured further evidence and follow-up information. This provided constructive challenge on how effectively the Council was supporting vulnerable learners close to their communities while managing demand and cost pressures.

Supporting Vulnerable Learners and Risk Register Update

At the same special meeting, the Committee scrutinised support for vulnerable learners and reviewed the strategic risk register. Members challenged the clarity of risk categorisation, the sufficiency of mitigation detail, the relationship between risk and budget, and whether major risks such as attendance, climate and school deficits were properly understood. This sharpened understanding of both service performance and the Council's wider risk environment.

10 June 2025 – Ordinary Meeting

Welsh Language Annual Report, Public Protection Performance and Registration Services

This meeting demonstrated the Committee's core role in reviewing service performance on behalf of residents. Members examined the Welsh Language Annual Report, Public Protection Performance and Registration Services, testing compliance, cost pressures, service standards, staffing resilience, enforcement activity, digital consistency and wider operational pressures. The discussion provided greater clarity on current performance, the factors contributing to service pressure, and the improvement actions or mitigations in place, while also recognising the importance of these services to local communities.

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9 July 2025 – Special Meeting

Review of Domiciliary Care Commissioning in the South of the County

The Committee undertook detailed scrutiny of the process and decision-making associated with the commissioning of domiciliary care contracts in the south of the county. Members examined transparency, procurement design, quality weighting, engagement with service users, continuity of care, workforce stability and democratic oversight. This scrutiny helped identify lessons for future commissioning activity and secured assurances that subsequent processes would be more transparent and better informed by service-user experience.

15 July 2025 – Ordinary Meeting

Revenue and Capital Monitoring Outturn and Medium-Term Financial Strategy

The Committee scrutinised year-end revenue and capital monitoring alongside the medium-term financial strategy. Members challenged structural overspends, capital slippage, dependency on one-off grants, school deficits, transport costs, vacancy management and the adequacy of longer-term plans to close future budget gaps. This strengthened financial accountability by ensuring that positive headline messages were tested against the underlying sustainability of the Council's position.

Self-Assessment 2024/25 and Enabling Strategies

Members also considered the Council's self-assessment and enabling strategies, including procurement, digital maturity, workforce issues and decarbonisation. The Committee's questions focused on whether the right data was being collected, how impact on residents was measured, and how enabling functions supported better service outcomes. This broadened scrutiny from service delivery alone to the systems and strategies that underpin organisational performance and continuous improvement.

23 September 2025 – Ordinary Meeting

Revenue Monitoring Update, Social Care Annual Report and Safeguarding Annual Report

This meeting illustrated the Committee's broad oversight role across both financial performance and frontline services. Members scrutinised the revenue position, the

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Social Care annual report and the Safeguarding annual report, challenging vacancy management, budget pressures, complaints learning, direct payments, service demand, demographic pressures, harmful sexual behaviour in schools and the evaluative quality of safeguarding reporting. The discussion drew clear links between service performance, resident outcomes and financial pressures.

18 November 2025 – Ordinary Meeting

Revenue Budget Financial Update and Medium-Term Financial Plan Update

The Committee continued its close examination of financial management, testing school deficit recovery, reserve resilience, demand modelling, practice-change savings in social care, grant dependency and the realism of future savings and transformation plans. Members sought greater clarity on intervention thresholds, service demand risk and the balance between recurring pressures and one-off mitigations. This sustained challenge strengthened public assurance and reinforced Cabinet accountability for financial stewardship.

Annual Health and Safety Report and Social Services Complaints Process

Beyond finance, the Committee scrutinised how the Council manages operational risk and learns from complaints. Members explored sickness absence, psychological illness, workplace stress, violence against staff, dashboard development, complaint timescales, communication failures and benchmarking with other authorities. This helped ensure that organisational health, safety and learning from service-user feedback were treated as integral elements of overall performance and service improvement.

3 December 2025 – Special Meeting

Economy, Employment and Skills Strategy Action Plan Update and Potholes and Road Conditions

The Committee scrutinised progress against the Economy, Employment and Skills Strategy and questioned how effectively the Council was responding to economic inactivity, business sustainability, skills shortages, transport barriers and the ending of Shared Prosperity Fund support. Members then examined highways performance, road condition management, drainage, communication with residents and the realism of operating within severe funding constraints. In both

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areas, scrutiny highlighted the need for clearer evidence of impact, future monitoring and practical follow-up action.

27 January 2026 – Special Meeting

School Exclusions, Schools Health Research Network and Strategic Risk Assessment

This meeting brought together several strands of the Committee's role. Members scrutinised rising school exclusions and the effectiveness of preventative and restorative approaches, considered Schools Health Research Network data to understand pupil wellbeing trends, and reviewed the Strategic Risk Assessment to identify areas requiring further scrutiny. This demonstrated the Committee's ability to connect operational performance, emerging need and strategic risk in a coherent way.

10 February 2026 – Ordinary Meeting

Financial Update and Draft Revenue and Capital Budget Proposals 2026/27

The Committee again undertook substantial budget scrutiny, questioning recovery plans for deficit schools, legal spend, housing overspends, debt recovery, passenger transport, storm recovery pressures, capital slippage and the structural sustainability of the budget. Members also tested the Cabinet's case for proposed council tax increases, efficiency savings and additional investment in highways and schools. This reflected the Committee's central role in holding the Executive to account for budget management and for the implications of financial decisions for residents.

Focused Challenge on Financial Resilience

This meeting was distinguished by the depth of challenge applied to the assumptions behind the budget, rather than to the headline figures alone. Members explored whether short-term gains were masking longer-term pressures and whether proposed mitigations were genuinely sustainable. In doing so, the Committee examined not only current financial performance but also the resilience, realism and transparency of the Council's financial planning.

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Key Themes and Outcomes Across the Year

Several consistent themes emerged from the Committee's work across the year. First, the Committee provided sustained challenge on the Council's financial position, testing both in-year monitoring and longer-term budget sustainability, particularly in relation to schools, social care, housing, transport and capital delivery.

Secondly, it maintained close oversight of frontline service performance, ensuring that annual reports and service updates were subject to detailed questioning on outcomes for residents, operational pressures and improvement actions. Thirdly, it strengthened assurance in relation to the Council's risk management arrangements by examining the relationship between strategic risks, mitigating actions and financial planning.

Finally, the Committee identified matters requiring further work, secured follow-up information where appropriate, and made a constructive contribution to transparency, accountability and service improvement across the Council.

Conclusion

Across the reporting period, the Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee made an important contribution to the Council's governance through consistent, evidence-based constructive challenge in relation to service performance, financial management, strategic risk and executive decision-making. Its work helped ensure that Cabinet Members and officers were held to account for the quality, resilience and affordability of services delivered to residents, while also supporting constructive reflection on how services and decisions can continue to improve.

The Committee strengthened transparency by testing the practical implications of policy and budget decisions, identifying matters requiring further consideration, and ensuring that risk, performance and finance were scrutinised in the round. Taken together, the year's work demonstrates the Committee's central role in supporting effective governance, informed decision-making and better outcomes for residents.