

Monmouthshire Scrutiny Committee Report: 2025-2026

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

Introduction

This report sets out the work undertaken by the Council's Place Scrutiny Committee during the 2025 municipal year, together with the meetings held on 29 January 2026 and 19 March 2026. It shows the effectiveness and added value of scrutiny in informing policy development, improving decision-making, strengthening accountability, and ensuring that the views of residents, stakeholders and communities are reflected in the Committee's work.

The report is based on the formal minutes of the Committee's meetings across the reporting period, including ordinary, special and call-in meetings, and provides a summary of the principal scrutiny topics considered and the outcomes achieved. In doing so, it highlights the challenge provided by members, the assurances obtained, the recommendations made, the actions secured, and the continuing contribution of scrutiny to policy development and decision-making.

Overview of Scrutiny Activity

Across the reporting period, the Place Scrutiny Committee considered a broad range of strategic and service issues, including the Replacement Local Development Plan, flood risk management, destination management, placemaking, markets, transport, culture, biodiversity, highway safety and animal welfare. It also scrutinised significant executive decisions through petitions and a formal call-in process, enabled public participation, and secured commitments, written responses, recommendations and follow-up actions from Cabinet Members and senior officers.

Scrutiny by Meeting and Topic

6 February 2025 – Ordinary Meeting

Petition: Safety of Zebra Crossing, Sandy Lane, Caldicot

The Committee scrutinised concerns about visibility, design and enforcement. The Cabinet Member acknowledged delays, committed to updated safety audits and a

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task-and-finish approach, and the matter was referred back for continued oversight.

Draft Revenue and Capital Budget Proposals 2025/26

Members undertook detailed scrutiny of the budget implications across Place services. Written follow-up responses were secured, improving transparency and highlighting the cumulative impact on communities.

27 March 2025 – Ordinary Meeting

Nedern Maintenance and Flooding

Scrutiny added value by bringing together NRW and Council officers in a public forum to clarify responsibilities for river maintenance, flood prevention and asset management. Members used local evidence from residents and businesses to probe the adequacy of maintenance arrangements, the relationship between flooding and wider river health issues, and the coordination needed between NRW, MCC and National Highways. This resulted in clearer public understanding of who was responsible for what, confirmation of improvements already made to annual maintenance and culvert inspections, and a commitment to further written responses and ongoing engagement, thereby strengthening accountability and follow-up.

Bats and Habitats Regulations Appraisal (RLDP)

In scrutinising the bats and habitats issues linked to the RLDP, members tested the strength of the ecological evidence, the wording of policy protections and the balance between development need and environmental safeguards. The discussion drew in external expertise and public concerns, particularly around survey requirements, core sustenance zones and the implications of proposed development near sensitive habitats. The added value of scrutiny was in requiring officers to explain and defend the approach in detail, place assurances on the record about further surveys and mitigation, and demonstrate how ecological considerations would continue to influence later planning stages, thereby improving transparency and confidence in the decision-making process.

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22 May 2025 – Ordinary Meeting

Active Travel

The Committee's scrutiny of Active Travel demonstrated added value by moving beyond support for the policy aims to test deliverability, fairness and responsiveness to local need. Members challenged officers on funding uncertainty, the prioritisation of smaller accessibility improvements such as dropped kerbs, the balance between urban and rural provision, traffic displacement, enforcement capacity and school safety. This produced a series of practical follow-up actions, including written updates, further information on schools and enforcement, and commitments to look again at prioritisation and accessibility concerns. Scrutiny therefore helped ensure that the programme was examined not only as a strategic ambition but also in terms of how it would work for residents in practice.

Public Open Forum – Disabled Access

The Public Open Forum on disabled access illustrated the added value of scrutiny as a route for lived experience to shape the Committee's work. Evidence presented directly to members highlighted everyday barriers affecting disabled residents in town centres and public spaces. The Committee responded constructively by agreeing that members should witness these issues first hand, ensuring that future scrutiny of transport, access and placemaking would be informed by practical experience as well as officer reporting.

11 June 2025 – Special Meeting (Call-in)

Letting of Former Abergavenny Library

The call-in meeting provided a clear example of the constitutional value of scrutiny in testing executive decisions after they have been made but before they take effect. The Committee enabled substantial public participation, examined concerns about transparency, market exposure, community consultation, historic significance and best value, and required Cabinet and officers to respond in detail in public session. The added value of scrutiny was not simply debate, but a formal outcome: the decision was referred back for reconsideration with clear reasons, including independent valuation, a fuller tender period, a building survey and community consultation. This demonstrated scrutiny's role as an important safeguard for accountability, due process and public confidence.

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10 July 2025 – Ordinary Meeting

Local Flood Strategy

Pre-decision scrutiny of the Local Flood Strategy added value by improving the quality of the strategy before adoption. Members challenged the adequacy of the consultation period, the accessibility of public information, the treatment of specific local flood risks, support for businesses, and the need for clearer emergency communication and community flood planning. Officers responded positively, indicating changes and follow-up actions including consideration of an extended consultation period, further work on public-facing information, and review of matters such as sandbag policy and localised flood actions. This demonstrated scrutiny's practical contribution in strengthening both the strategy itself and the arrangements for community engagement around it.

Car Parking Review

The Car Parking Review showed the added value of scrutiny in identifying where proposals were not yet sufficiently evidenced. Members challenged the underlying data, the lack of local consultation in some areas, the implications for enforcement capacity, accessibility, payment methods, town centre vitality and the practical consequences of charging structures. As a result, scrutiny secured commitments to correct errors, provide additional information and undertake further consultation before changes are implemented. In this way, the Committee improved the robustness of the review and helped guard against premature policy decisions.

25 September 2025 – Ordinary Meeting

Deposit Replacement Local Development Plan Consultation Report

The Committee's scrutiny of the Deposit RLDP Consultation Report demonstrated significant added value in relation to process, transparency and democratic accountability. Members tested whether consultation had been meaningful, challenged the extent to which representations had influenced the report, and raised detailed questions on viability, infrastructure, flooding, ecology, accessibility of documentation and the balance of the plan across the county. The Committee also ensured that its own scrutiny minutes were appended to the report going forward to Council, so that the challenge, concerns and observations raised in

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scrutiny formed part of the formal record available at the next stage of decision-making and independent examination.

9 October 2025 – Special Meeting

Destination Management Plan

Scrutiny of the Destination Management Plan added value by testing how the strategy would work in practice for residents, businesses and visitors rather than simply endorsing its overall ambition. Members questioned regional partnership working, the accessibility of the visitor offer, environmental pressures on sensitive locations, policy impacts on accommodation providers, the visibility of the Welsh language and the presentation of Monmouthshire's tourism identity. This challenge prompted officers to acknowledge areas for improvement, including stronger reference to the Welsh language and follow-up on visitor feedback and accessibility information. The scrutiny process therefore helped refine the plan and ensure a more balanced approach between economic opportunity, inclusion and place protection.

Litter and Fly-tipping

In considering litter and fly-tipping, the Committee added value by challenging how enforcement, prevention and community action could best be combined. Members explored behaviour change, signage, smart technology, support for volunteers, the practical reach of new funding streams and the need for visible deterrence. The discussion helped reinforce a proportionate approach in which education and communication sit alongside enforcement, while also recognising and encouraging the contribution of community volunteers to keeping the county clean.

6 November 2025 – Ordinary Meeting

Placemaking Plans

The scrutiny of the Placemaking Plans showed added value in moving the discussion from vision to delivery. Members probed how delivery groups would operate, how resource and capacity issues would be addressed, how local involvement would be maintained over time and how success would eventually be measured. This ensured that the committee's role was not limited to endorsing the plans' aspirations, but extended to testing governance, accountability and the

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realism of implementation arrangements, thereby strengthening confidence in the next stage of the work.

Markets and Stalls

Scrutiny of Markets and Stalls highlighted the Committee's contribution to local regeneration by focusing on the practical barriers affecting market vitality. Members explored infrastructure needs, trader support, advertising, market locations, storage, weather protection and collaboration with local partners. This challenge helped draw attention to specific actions and follow-up responses, while reinforcing the role of markets as part of wider town centre regeneration rather than as an isolated operational issue.

29 January 2026 – Ordinary Meeting

Cultural Strategy

The Committee undertook pre-decision scrutiny of the Cultural Strategy, considering inclusivity, representation, Welsh language visibility, volunteering, and the relationship between culture, tourism, placemaking and heritage policy. Through this scrutiny, members strengthened assurance on the strategic direction of the document and highlighted areas where fuller recognition of local identity, community participation and cross-policy alignment would be beneficial.

Biodiversity and Resilience

The Committee scrutinised the Biodiversity and Resilience report, examining enforcement capacity, ecological monitoring, community engagement, regenerative farming and public understanding of the Nature Isn't Neat approach. This enabled members to obtain assurance on delivery challenges, identify the need for continued follow-up, and reinforce the importance of coordinated action across environmental services and partner organisations.

19 March 2026 – Ordinary Meeting

Prohibition of Driving Except for Access, Goldwire Lane, Monmouth

The Committee scrutinised the proposal relating to Goldwire Lane, Monmouth, considering consultation evidence, road safety, active travel duties, signage constraints, accessibility and alternative route options. Members agreed a formal

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recommendation to Cabinet that the permanent order should not yet be endorsed and that the available options should be reviewed further, demonstrating the Committee's role in testing the robustness of the evidence and the balance of competing considerations.

Animal Welfare

The Committee also received a detailed report on Animal Welfare, which clarified the Council's statutory powers, resource pressures, partnership constraints and enforcement challenges. Scrutiny secured follow-up action on member learning and the circulation of presentation materials, while also strengthening understanding of the service's responsibilities and the wider pressures affecting delivery.

Conclusion

Across the reporting period, the Place Scrutiny Committee added clear value by improving the quality of decision-making, strengthening accountability, reflecting public and stakeholder perspectives, and influencing executive action across a broad range of Place-based services and policy areas. The evidence set out in this report shows that scrutiny continued to provide constructive challenge, secure follow-up action, and support more informed and transparent decision-making.

The Committee's added value lay in its ability to bring public concerns, local knowledge and member challenge into the formal decision-making process; to test the strength of evidence, policy assumptions and delivery arrangements; and to secure tangible outcomes such as recommendations, written responses, reconsideration of decisions and further action by officers and Cabinet Members. In this respect, scrutiny has not only supported accountability, but has also made a practical contribution to better policy, better governance and better-informed decisions.