

Monmouthshire County Council
Guide to Local Democracy



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Introduction

Monmouthshire County Council are committed to encouraging members of the public to engage in the democratic process and influence the decisions taken by the Council that effect the everyday lives of residents of Monmouthshire.

This guide has been published to assist residents in understanding the democratic process and the role they can play in local democracy. We hope this informs residents and help them understand the processes behind the decisions on what information is available to members of the public to help them get involved.

Meetings Overview

The Council operates under the executive council system. This is where fellow councillors elect a Leader of the Council at every annual general meeting (AGM). The Leader then appoints up to 8 fellow County Councillors to sit on the Cabinet. The Cabinet meet as a whole and make decisions as well each Cabinet member having their own portfolio of services and being able to make decisions individually in their own service areas. The majority of the decisions of the Council will be taken by either Full Council, Cabinet or Individual Cabinet Member Decisions.

These meetings are supported by four select committee's who role is to scrutinise decisions taken by Full Council or Cabinet or to present new ideas to the meetings for them to make decisions on. The select committee's are split into four committee's with varying responsibilities and depending on the nature of the report/decision depends on which select committee its referred to. The four select committee's are Adults, Children and Young People, Economy and Development and Strong Communities.

There are a number of statutory committee's that the council must operate as well as the above including Licensing and Regulatory, Planning and Audit. Other committees include Standards Committee which cover the conduct of councillors and Democratic Services Committee who oversee the facilities for councillors and promote local democracy. There are also four area committees covering defined areas of Monmouthshire that consider local issues and decisions.

Committee Responsibility and Membership

Adults Select

Adults Select is one of four select committee's in the council who are responsible for scrutinising decisions of the Council and Cabinet to ensure that policies are being implemented correctly and best practice and value for money is achieved. Membership of the select committee is made up of nine members of the council who are not members of the Cabinet.

Adults Select ensure that services are relevant and responsive to the needs of Adults and protect and promote health and well-being, including amongst others the following relevant areas:

- Safeguarding Adults, including Mental Health services and Disability services.
- Adult Social Care, including Domiciliary Care, Residential Care, Nursing Home Care, Community Care, Occupational Therapy, Re-ablement, Assistive Technology, Community Meals Service, Sensory Impairment Services.
- Support to Families and Carers, including Respite and Short Breaks.
- Adult Education, including Learning Disability Services.
- Integrated Adults Services with Health Partners.
- Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.
- Protecting and supporting vulnerable Adults.
- “Transition agenda” from young people to Adults.
- Protecting vulnerable Adults (POVA) and Supporting People.
- Homelessness prevention.
- Domestic Violence Service, Drug and Alcohol Services.
- Public health and wellbeing promotion through Single Integrated Plan.
- Leisure services in terms of health outcomes.
- Welfare Rights.
- Community Legal Service.

Audit Committee

The Audit Committee has responsibility for ensuring the authority is operating within its remit and ensures sufficient checks are in place to identify any potential misconduct within the authority. The committee’s main responsibilities include:

- Approving the internal audit strategy, plan & performance
- Review internal audit reports and seek assurances of change where required
- Consider the reports of external audit and inspection agencies
- Consider the effectiveness of the authority’s risk management arrangements
- Maintain an overview of the Council’s Constitution in respect of contract procedure rules and financial regulations
- Make recommendations, as appropriate, to Cabinet and Council on any matters reported through the Audit Committee.

The Audit Committee consist of eleven members of the council and also includes one lay person member, who is not a member of the council, to ensure transparency and independence in the process.

Area Committees

Monmouthshire is split into four area committees, Severnside, Bryn-Y-Cwm, Central Monmouthshire and Lower Wye. Each committee is responsible for a defined area and raising awareness within the Council of local issues.

County Councillors for the wards within the area are invited to attend the meeting which is held locally within the area the committee is responsible for.

Cabinet & Individual Cabinet Members Decisions

Cabinet consist of 8 county councillors, including the leader and deputy/deputies, appointed to the cabinet by the leader of the Council. Each Cabinet member has their own portfolio with responsibility for a number of services within the Council.

Decision for cabinet can be taken by all cabinet members at a cabinet meeting or by the individual cabinet member depending on the type of decision, and its implications, that is to be taken.

The main responsibility of Cabinet is to ensure that council policies are implemented correctly and discharge any other functions that are not the responsibility of the Council.

A list of the cabinet members and their portfolio is available on the Council website.

Children & Young People Select

Children & Young People Select is one of four select committee's in the council who are responsible for scrutinising decisions of the Council and Cabinet to ensure that policies are being implemented correctly and best practice and value for money is achieved. Membership of the select committee is made up of nine members of the council who are not members of the Cabinet.

The Children & Young People Select ensure that services are relevant and responsive to the needs of young people and protect and promote their health and well-being, including amongst others the following relevant areas:

- Safeguarding Children, including social care and health, services for vulnerable children and families, Child Protection, Children in Public Care, Home Finding, Family Centres and Aids & Adaptations for disabled children.
- Youth Justice and youth offending service.
- Youth clubs and leisure facilities for young people.
- Special Support Services, Pupil Support Services.
- Education, including School Performance Management, Resource Management, Management, Governor Support, Health & Safety, Financial and ICT Services, School Planning, Transport, Admissions, Student Grants and School Meals.
- Management of Individual Schools Budgets, Schools Delegated Budgets, the Authority's Schools Individually Managed Budgets.

Council

Council is a meeting of all the councillors whose main responsibility is to agree the council budget for the forthcoming year and agree policy framework.

The Council also decide upon the political management framework and decide how councillors should be allocated to other committees both internally and externally.

It is also the role of Council to appoint the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive and agree any changes to the constitution which the council must abide by.

Democratic Services Committee

The Democratic Services Committee consists of eleven councillors. The committee has responsibility for ensuring that the democratic element of the council is operating correctly including ensuring there is sufficient provision of staff, accommodation and resources to support councillors in their role.

The committee are also responsible for appointing the head of democratic services.

It has also has responsibility for promoting and engaging residents in local democracy.

Economy & Development Select

Economy & Development Select is one of four select committee's in the council who are responsible for scrutinising decisions of the Council and Cabinet to ensure that policies are being implemented correctly and best practice and value for money is achieved. Membership of the select committee is made up of nine members of the council who are not members of the Cabinet.

Economy & Development Select ensure they are responsive to the needs of businesses, residents and visitors and promote economic activity, including amongst others the following relevant areas:

- Scrutiny of the Management of Regeneration and Culture Directorate.
- Strategic economic development, place shaping and enterprise.
- Promoting and sustaining economic growth.
- Job creation and ensuring opportunities for skills and vocational training.
- Public Health, Environmental Health and Trading Standards.
- Public realm – Culture, libraries, museums and theatre.
- The Planning Function – Building Control, Development Control, Local Development Plans, Economic Development and Housing.
- Scrutiny of collaborative initiatives such as the Shared Resource Service (SRS) and CMC2 and any others as appropriate.
- Procurement.

Licensing and Regulatory Committee

The Licensing and Regulatory Committee is made up of 12 councillors and considers requests from businesses or individuals to hold an event or conduct their business which requires a licence approved by the local authority.

More information on licensing is available [_ LINK TO LICENSING PAGES](#)

Planning

Standards Committee

The Standards Committee are responsible for promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by councillors, co-opted members and church and parent governor representatives. It is their role to assist the above in complying with the members code of conduct and, where necessary, investigating reports or complaints of breach of the code of conduct which extend

to town and community councils. The committee must also ensure that the authority's whistle blowing policy and complaints procedure operates effectively.

The standards Committee consists of 3 councillors, 5 co-opted individuals with voting powers and 1 individual from the community.

Strong Communities Select

Strong Communities Select is one of four select committee's in the council who are responsible for scrutinising decisions of the Council and Cabinet to ensure that policies are being implemented correctly and best practice and value for money is achieved. Membership of the select committee is made up of nine members of the council who are not members of the Cabinet.

Strong Communities Select ensure they are responsive to the needs of residents and promote their safety and well-being. Key roles for this committee are:

- To ensure the Council supports the development of new and sustainable communities and supports the resilience of existing communities through Local area co-ordination.
- To review and improve the Council's links with the Voluntary Sector.
- To scrutinise the delivery of the Single Integrated Plan, allocating specific scrutiny areas to other select committees where appropriate.
- To scrutinise key services provided in partnership to local communities to ensure effective multi-agency action is delivered, including amongst others:
 - Infrastructure and networks.
 - Highways (including SWTRA), Transport and Traffic Management.
 - Street Lighting.
 - Waste Management.
 - Community Safety.
 - Estates and Sustainability.
 - Facilities and Accommodation Management.
 - Citizen Engagement.
 - Community Safety.
 - Chief Executive Function.
 - Revenues, Council Tax, Non-Domestic Rates and Finance.
 - Corporate Costs / Levies.
 - Appropriations (including external debt costs from earmarked reserves, costs resulting from fixed asset disposal).
 - Financing (including core funding from WG, council tax income).

How do the committees decide what issues to consider and take decisions on?

The majority of committees have a document called a forward work programme. These documents are publicly available for residents to review and be aware of the issues that are up for discussion and at which meeting.

The forward work programmes are populated in a number of ways. Officers of the council will populate it with issues that arise, are scheduled for completion or because there is a

legislative requirement to review the current policy. The chair of the committee will also populate the work planner with items that he/she consider important to the committee or have been brought to the chairs attention. Additionally, the chair may populate the work planner with items for discussion that members of the public have asked the committee to consider.

For example, a committee such as standards which covers statutory items and policies, will know the items that it is going to discuss in advance and will only change significantly depending on any issues of councillor misbehaviour that is brought to its attention. However, a select committee or Cabinet forward work planner will change frequently due to decision that a select committee may call in or the urgency of decisions that the committee must consider.

[How can I see what is to be debated at a meeting?](#)

For every meeting of the council, at least five clear working days before, an agenda is published detailing the location, date and time of the meeting as well as a list of items that the committee is to debate. Most items on the agenda will also have reports supporting the item which give details as to why a decision needs to be made, background information relating to the issues of the topic and a recommendation as to what decision should be taken.

All agendas and reports are published on the council website and are available for members of the public to download. A small number of paper copies of the agenda and reports will be made available at the meeting for members of the public. If you wish to receive a hard copy at a meeting it is worthwhile informing democratic services so that we can ensure enough copies are available.

[I can't attend a meeting of the Council, how can I find out what has been discussed?](#)

For every meeting of the Council a set of minutes will be made and agreed at the next meeting of that particular committee. The minutes will act as a true record of the proceedings at a particular meeting.

[Watch a meeting of the Council online](#)

As of September 2014 any meeting held within the Council Chamber at County Hall, Usk will be recorded and streamed live for residents to watch, as well as being stored in an archive for residents to watch at a later date.

More information and recording of meetings is available on the Council website.

[How do I find out about a decision previously taken by the Council?](#)

The Council will make available for inspection for a period of 6 years any agendas, minutes and reports of a committee of the council. If the papers are not available on the Council

website you can view paper copies by contacting the democratic services office and inspecting them at the headquarters.

How can influence the decisions that are being made?

Voting

The first way residents can get involved may sound obvious but is probably the most influence that any resident of Monmouthshire has over the County Council. County Councillors are elected to the County Council, usually every four years, by the electors of Monmouthshire. By voting, if you have your say on who it is that represents you within the Council and who is the spokesperson for the area in which you live. The relationship between a councillor and their electorate has to be a two way relationship. They want to keep you as a voter happy to be re-elected and the only way they can achieve that is by representing you in the best way possible in the Council. Next time you vote at any election, rather than thinking of it as a cross on a piece of paper, think of it as how you want to be represented in the future and who will do the best work for you.

To vote in elections you simply need to be over the age of 18 and registered on the electoral roll with the Council. You can register online at www.gov.uk/registertovote

Stand as a councillor

Some residents may not vote because they don't believe that anyone standing for election will represent them sufficiently in the Council. This is where it is your opportunity to stand for election to the Council and personally represent the area in which reside.

To stand for election to the County Council you must be over 18, be a British, Commonwealth or European citizen and meet one of the following four criteria:

- You are, and will continue to be, registered as a local government elector within the local authority area.
- Occupied as owner or tenant any land or premises within the local authority for the whole 12 months previous to the day of nomination and election.
- Your main or only place of work has been within the local authority area for the whole 12 months previous to the day of nomination and election.
- You have lived within the local authority area for the whole 12 months previous to the day of nomination and election.

You can also stand for election to community and town councils in Monmouthshire with the rules on standing for election similar to the above.

The full elections to the County Council and Community and Town Councils is due in May 2017. Vacancies can arise during the term of office for all councils and are advertised on the County Council website as well as in the local area.

Attend and take part in a meeting

Any resident of Monmouthshire can attend any meeting of the Council and observe the proceedings and debate taking place. Most meetings are held in the Council Chamber at County Hall, Usk which has a dedicated public viewing gallery. Other meetings, such as area committee meetings, are held outside of County Hall but members of the public are welcome to attend those as well.

The location, date and start time of meetings are available on the agenda produced for the meeting which is available to download from the Council website.

Any person attending the meeting may be excluded from proceedings where an agenda item has been classified as exempt. Exempt items are usually where sensitive or confidential information may be discussed and is only available to those able to vote on the matter.

Add an item to an agenda for discussion

There are two ways that a member of the public can encourage a committee to consider an item and have it added to the agenda of a future meeting.

- Any member of the public can contact the chair of a committee and request that they add an item to the forward work programme for future discussion
- Attend a meeting of the relevant committee and request at the meeting under the item forward work programmes that an item is added for future consideration.

Submit a question to Council

Members of the public are entitled to ask a question of any Member of the Cabinet at a meeting of full Council. Questions are limited to one question per individual or organisation and will be asked in the order notice of them was received unless the chairman of the Council wishes to group certain questions together. The total time allotted to public questions at a Council meeting should be limited to 15 minutes.

A question may only be asked if notice has been given by delivering it in writing or by email to the Head of Democratic Services no later than midday seven working days before the day of the meeting. Each person submitting a question must provide their name and address.

A question may be rejected if:

- The question is not about a matter for which the Council has responsibility or which affects the County
- Is defamatory, frivolous or offensive
- Is substantially the same as a question which has been put at a meeting of the Council in the past six months
- Requires the disclosure of confidential or exempt information

The Chairman will invite the questioner to put the question to the relevant Councillor. If a questioner who has submitted a written question is unable to be present, they may ask the chair to put the question to the councillor on their behalf. The chairman may ask the question,

indicate that a written reply will be provided by the councillor, or as the questioner is not present decide that the question will not be dealt with.

A questioner may ask one supplementary question without notice to the Councillor which may arise directly out of the original question or the reply.

Any question which cannot be dealt with during the meeting, either due to lack of time or non attendance of the relevant councillor, will be dealt with by a written response.

Submit views to select committees

Under the Local Government Act (Wales) 2011, any member of the public can attend one of the four select committees held by the Council and submit their views on a particular item on the agenda. The Committee must give full consideration to the views submitted by a member of the public under these arrangements.

Submit a comment or complaint

A member of the public may comment or complain about a service received by the Council by:

- Contacting their local County Councillor
- Contacting the member of cabinet responsible for the service area
- Contacting the responsible officer at the Council or their line manager
- Using the Councils complaints procedure
- Contacting the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales at 1 Ffordd Yr Hen Gae, Pencoed, CF35 5LJ. Telephone: 0845 601 0987 or via the website www.ombudsman-wales.org.uk.

Comments or complaints regarding the conduct of a councillor should be directed to the Council's Monitoring Officer or the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.