



Monmouthshire County Council
Guide to Local Democracy



monmouthshire
sir fynwy

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Introduction

Monmouthshire County Council want the public to engage in the democratic process and influence the decisions taken by Monmouthshire County Council.

There are 43 elected Councillors who represent 42 areas of Monmouthshire. County Councillors are responsible for not only representing the residents within the area they were elected to but also for making decisions that affect the whole of the County.

The County Councillors appoint a Chief Executive of the Council who is responsible for implementing policies and decisions taken by the Councillors.

The Council operates under the executive council system.

Councillors elect a Leader of the Council at every annual general meeting (AGM). The Leader appoints up to 8 County Councillors to sit on the Cabinet.

The Cabinet meet as a whole to make decisions. Each Cabinet member has their own portfolio of services and are able to make decisions individually in their own service areas. The majority of the decisions of the Council will be taken by Cabinet or Individual Cabinet Member Decisions.

Four Select Committee's scrutinise the decisions taken by Cabinet and present new proposals to the Cabinet. The four select committee's are Adults, Children and Young People, Economy and Development and Strong Communities and each have varying responsibilities.

Statutory committee's the council include Licensing and Regulatory, Planning and Audit. Standards Committee cover the conduct of councillors. Democratic Services Committee oversee facilities for councillors and promote local democracy. There are also four Area Committees and the Rural Forum which consider local issues.

Responsibilities and Membership

Council

Council is a meeting of all 43 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.

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

Cabinet & Individual Cabinet Members Decisions

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

Decisions 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.

Cabinet is responsible for ensuring that council policies are implemented correctly and discharges 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.

Select Committee's

Four Select Committee's are responsible for scrutinising decisions of the Council and Cabinet ensuring policies are being implemented correctly, that best practice and value for money is achieved. Membership of each select committee is made up of nine members of the council who are not members of the Cabinet.

Adults Select

Adults Select Committee ensures that services are relevant and responsive to the needs of adults, 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.

Children & Young People Select

Children & Young People Select ensure services are relevant and responsive to the needs of young people, protecting and promoting 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.

Economy & Development Select

Economy & Development Select are responsive to the needs of businesses, residents and visitors, promoting economic activity, including:

- 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 others as appropriate.
- Procurement.

Strong Communities Select

Strong Communities Select ensure they are responsive to the needs of residents, promoting 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).

Statutory Committee's

Licensing and Regulatory Committee

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

Planning

The role of the Planning Committee is to guide the council in the formulation of its policies relating to Town and Country Planning and to exercise the powers and duties of the council as the Planning Authority. The committee consists of 16 councillors.

The Planning Committee determines applications under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and related legislation in relation to the following:

- Planning applications for mineral extraction or waste disposal unless in respect of small-scale works which are ancillary to an existing mineral working or waste disposal facility;
- Planning applications accompanied by an Environmental Impact Statement;
- Planning applications which represent a significant departure from Structure Plan or Local Plan Policy;
- Planning applications which, by their scale, nature or location, have implications which extend beyond the limits of the area in which they are situated.

Audit Committee

The Audit Committee has responsibility for ensuring that sufficient checks are in place to identify any potential misconduct within the authority. The Committee consists of 11 councillors and includes one lay member who is not a councillor. 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.

Standards Committee

The Standards Committee is responsible for promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by councillors, co-opted members, 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 also ensure that the authority's whistle blowing policy and complaints procedure operate effectively.

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

Democratic Services Committee

The Democratic Services Committee consists of eleven councillors. The committee has responsibility for ensuring the democratic element of the council is operating correctly including ensuring sufficient staff, accommodation and resources are available to support councillors in their role. The Committee are also responsible for promoting local democracy.

The committee designates the head of democratic services.

Area Committees

Monmouthshire has four Area Committees, Severnside, Bryn-Y-Cwm, Central Monmouthshire and Lower Wye each responsible for raising awareness of local issues.

County, Community and Town Councillors for the wards within the areas attend the meetings which are held locally within the area the committee is responsible for.

The Rural Forum is open to Community and Town Councils and County Councillors which look to address issues in predominantly rural areas of Monmouthshire.

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

The majority of meetings have a forward work programme which identify issues that are up for discussion at which meeting.

The forward work programmes are populated by the legislative requirement to review current policies, by issues raised by Councillors and Officers and by issues that members of the public have raised.

For example, the Standards Committee which covers statutory items and policies, will know issues in advance and will only change significantly if an issue of councillor misbehaviour is brought to its attention. However, a select committee or Cabinet forward work planner will change frequently due to decisions that a select committee may "call in" (the process of councillors requesting scrutiny of a decision taken by the Cabinet or Individual Cabinet Member) or the urgency of decisions that the committee must consider.

How can I see what is to be debated at a meeting?

At least five clear working days before any meeting an agenda is published detailing the location, date and time of the meeting. The agenda will contain a list of items that the meeting

will consider. Most items on the agenda will have reports supporting the item detailing why a decision needs to be made, background information and a recommendation.

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 are available at meetings for members of the public.

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 act as a true record of the proceedings.

Watch a meeting of the Council online

As of October 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.

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 to influence the decisions that are being made?

By Voting

County Councillors are elected to the County Council, usually every four years, by the electors of Monmouthshire. By voting, you have your say on who it is that represents you within the Council. 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 need to be over the age of 18 and registered on the Councils electoral roll. You can register online at www.gov.uk/registertovote

Stand as a councillor

To stand for election to the County Council you must be over 18, 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.

Elections to the County Council and Community and Town Councils are 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](#)

Residents 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 gallery. Other meetings, such as area committee meetings that are held around the County, members of the public are welcome to attend.

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.

Exempt items are where sensitive or confidential information may be discussed. This information is only available to those able to vote on the matter and will require exclusion of all other persons from the meeting.

[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 public forum item that an item is added for future consideration to the forward work programme.

[Submit a question to Council](#)

Members of the public are entitled to ask a question or raise an issue 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.

In order to ask a question, notice must be given by delivering it in writing or by email to the Head of Democratic Services no later than midnight 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. If a questioner who has submitted a written question is unable to be present, they may ask the chair to put the question on their behalf. The chairman may ask the question and indicate that a written reply will be provided or 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 select committees 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.