



MINUTES OF THE MID WALES CORPORATE JOINT COMMITTEE

HELD ON THURSDAY, 12TH OCTOBER 2023

11 AM TO 12.30 PM VIA ZOOM WEBINAR

PRESENT

Powys County Council

County Councillor James Gibson-Watt, Leader / Chair of the Mid Wales CJC
Diane Reynolds, Interim Director, Economy & Community Services (DR)
Clive Pinney, Head of Legal and Democratic Services / CJC Monitoring Officer
Nicola Williams, Strategic Programme Delivery Manager (NW)
Julie Williams, Programme Support Officer (*taking notes*)

In attendance:

Paul Griffiths, Consultant (PG)
Sara-Jane Byrne, Audit Manager, Audit Wales (SJB)

Ceredigion County Council

County Councillor Bryan Davies, Leader / Vice Chair of Mid Wales CJC
Eifion Evans, Chief Executive (EE)
Barry Rees, Corporate Director (BR)
Duncan Hall, Section 151 Officer and Corporate Lead Officer: Finance and Procurement (DH)
Elin Prysor, Corporate Lead Officer-Legal & Governance Services (& Monitoring Officer) (EP)

In attendance:

Sarah Groves-Phillips, Planning Policy Manager, Economy & Regeneration (SGP)
Ann Elias, TraCC Projects and Programme Manager (AE)
Carol Thomas, Translator

Bannau Brycheiniog

County Councillor Gareth Ratcliffe, Vice Chair of BBNPA (GR)

Gareth Jones, Director of Planning and Place (GJ)

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the Mid Wales Corporate Joint Committee Formal Meeting and introductions for Diane Reynolds and Sara-Jane Byrne took place.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies received -

Powys County Council

Jack Straw, Interim Chief Executive

Nigel Brinn, Executive Director, Economy & Environment

County Councillor Jake Berriman

Ceredigion County Council

Carwyn Jones-Evans, Growth & Major Development Service Manager

Justin Davies, Corporate Manager: Core Finance

3. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There were no disclosures of interests to declare relating to matters to be considered on the agenda.

4. MINUTES OF LAST MID WALES CJC FORMAL AND AGM MEETING
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To approve the minutes of the Mid Wales CJC & AGM Meeting held on 31st July 2023.

County Councillor Bryan Davies proposed that the minutes of the CJC & AGM meeting held on 31st July 2023 be signed as a true record, County Councillor Gareth Ratcliffe seconded, also agreed by The Chair, County Councillor James Gibson-Watt.

5. AUDIT WALES LETTER "COMMENTARY ON CJC'S PROGRESS MID WALES CJC - SARA-JANE BYRNE, AUDIT MANAGER

The Audit Wales letter dated 21st August 2023 had previously been circulated to members of the CJC.

The Chair welcomed Sara Jane Byrne from Audit Wales to the meeting who provided CJC members and officers with a summary of the key findings from the letter. The following was noted:

The Auditor General of Wales has been appointed as Auditor for the Corporate Joint Committee. The letter aims to better understand the progress of the CJC with some initial Audit work undertaken Autumn 2022, presented to the CJC during Springtime 2023 and again in early Summer 2023.

It is acknowledged that work will have moved on since the date of the letter but just to draw out several points –

- Understanding the Welsh Government's aims for the CJC's -

At the time of undertaking the work there were mixed views of the value of the CJC's but CJC's recognised that it had a Legal requirement and was progressing with what was required.

Cllr Bryan Davies stressed the sense of frustration with the Welsh Government's preparedness for the new Body within all CJC's, not just Mid Wales, particularly around the financial status issues. Cllr James Gibson Watt commented that as we are only two LAs in the Mid Wales CJC, we already have got in place arrangements for joint working.

- Evolving governance arrangements –

The core arrangements were in place, at the time there was only one Sub Committee up and running and Audit Wales were setting out their expectations that governance arrangements be commenced as things progressed.

- CJC's plans to deliver the Welsh Government aims and meet their statutory obligations –

The CJC was developing its priorities and was positive to see that it was making progress, especially with its Strategic Development Planning function and it was agreed to set up a dedicated team to support that.

Audit Wales acknowledges the financial status issues and the RTP Guidance but wishes to see more progress around the RTP side. A CJC Workshop has recently taken place and Audit Wales are keen to learn what progress has been made.

(This is on the agenda today).

- How the CJC relates to existing partnership arrangements –

The Auditor General commented several times on the complexity of the landscape and the keenness to understand how these corporate bodies will all work together. From the draft Corporate Plan at the time, the CJC recognises that it needs to work with all the different partnerships and again the Auditor

General will expect further work around this and, how to maximise the involvement of Bannau Brycheiniog.

- CJC's plans to meet their requirements under the WFG Act, including setting their well-being objectives –

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At the time the CJC had not published its Well-being objectives although draft ones had been commented on. Audit Wales wanted to highlight that it's about how the CJC has a statutory duty to apply the Sustainable Development principle and the opportunity that brings.

Audit Wales are intending to publish a National Report in the next couple of weeks which will include a high-level summary of the cumulative findings from across the four CJC's and set out the Auditor General's expectations of the CJC's for the next 12/18 months.

Findings are general, as it recognised the four CJC's are at different points and as such some of the aspects will be more pertinent than others, so needs to be read in conjunction with the individual letters.

An advanced embargoed copy of the National Report will be sent to each CJC prior to publication.

County Councillor Bryan Davies reiterated the frustration felt by the four CJC's with the Welsh Government and sought assurances that these had been feedback?

SJB confirmed CJC frustrations had been fed back to Welsh Government who have also had sight of the four letters sent out to each CJC. The issues will also appear in the National Report mentioned earlier.

To date SJB advised that the Welsh Government are aware and recognise that there are lessons to be learnt.

The Chair thanked SJB and noted the four CJC's analysis, the different make up and number of authorities that may be included in each CJC.

The Chair reiterated from a Mid Wales CJC perspective, the value of the CJC, as two local Authorities that make it up plus Bannau Brycheiniog, where there are already joint working relationships on a wide range of issues including Education.

The Chair points out, the CJC is trying to avoid duplication of work and acknowledges that WG have given the CJC's a variable geometry to work within. The CJC will be adapted to work for the best of people in Mid Wales and for the Local Authorities and to ensure that work is not diverting from that which is best left at local level.

SJB confirmed that there were statutory functions and powers that the CJC had to fulfil but flexibility was one Welsh Governments concepts for each CJC. The National Report will reflect what was found a year back for example but recently

things have been a bit more optimistic with the conclusion of the financial status and other issues.

County Councillor Gareth Ratcliffe reiterated that Bannau Brycheiniog cross over several CJC's and the impact that this causes on Officers in terms of the work required and number of memberships on CJC's Sub Committees. Some guidance/stability would be appreciated as far as the Bannau Brycheiniog is concerned.

SJB acknowledges there is a role that the National Parks will work within and given the geographical reach of Bannau Brycheiniog and their own duties, it is important that as a CJC they look to maximise that perhaps beyond things like Strategic Development Planning where the role is key. Audit Wales wants to ensure that these conversations were happening and that the National Parks are being engaged as appropriate considering their broader remit.

County Councillor Bryan Davies wanted to note that potentially there will be another National Park (North) that will become a member of the CJC.

Audit Wales are not able to comment on that specifically, but Welsh Government would be better placed on the dynamics and practical implications.

EE expressed concern with the language used in respect of the Audit Wales presentation earlier, i.e., "the expectations of the Auditor General."

The CJC must work within the parameters of the legislation and are accountable directly to Welsh Government. It is agreed that the CJC is regulated by Audit Wales, but the language used about maximising benefits, is for the discretion of members of the CJC Board. In recent communications with Julie James MS, Minister for Climate Change it was clear to the Partner organisations that the CJC must clearly be utilised to add value for the taxpayers of that region and therefore the discretion must sit with the Chair, Vice Chair and the representative from Bannau Brycheiniog. Agreed that Mid Wales CJC is accountable to Audit Wales but only by proving that it is adding value.

SJB acknowledges this point, reiterating that Audit Wales are keen to see progress around the statutory functions of each CJC and that best use is being made of those resources. The National Report will cover many of these aspects.

6.	APPROACH TO AUDITING THE MID WALES CORPORATE JOINT COMMITTEE 2023 - SARA-JANE BYRNE, AUDIT MANAGER
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A letter setting out the approach to auditing the CJC which follows on from an earlier letter about the financial audit.

Audit Wales will monitor the CJC's progress over the coming year and attending meetings and seeing documents will assist with this. It sets out the small fee, showing the work over that year.

It was noted that it would have been advantageous to know about the Audit Wales fee at the beginning of the financial year so that it could have been budgeted accordingly.

In the first instance, the CJC's were not invited to discuss the fees and secondly the fees were issued during the financial year.

Audit Wales must recognise that the discretion sits with the Board and with the financial pressures that all three partner agencies will be facing over the coming year there has to be assurances of what is being budgeted.

SJB acknowledged this, advising that Audit Wales wanted to finish a piece of work which had been funded by the Welsh Consolidated Fund before determining work needed and issuing notice of that work. Discussions have already taken place internally within Audit Wales to ensure that advance notice is given for any future fees.

7.	CJC - CORPORATE PLAN FINAL DRAFT / FEEDBACK FROM CJC WORKSHOP ON FRIDAY, 6TH OCTOBER 2023
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It is to be noted on record that Paul Griffiths has been thanked for an excellent job in producing the draft CJC Corporate Plan.

Upon approval today, the draft CJC Corporate Plan will be circulated in its draft form for consultation. The document will then be translated and then go to formal public consultation for a set period.

An important point to remember is that there has been an extensive internal consultation, taking it as a combination of the Corporate Plans and the Corporate priorities of the three Partner organisations already in place and to this effect again we thank Paul Griffiths for bringing those three areas together.

The CJC Corporate Plan will be a framework for future developments. The CJC is made up of three organisations and the draft plan tries to ensure that this is embedded without duplicating or contradicting what is already in place.

Workshops have taken place over the past few months and comments raised have been included in the draft plan and further comments will be taken into consideration as part of the consultation process.

Further new comments will be shared amongst the Board and decisions on appropriate revisions and timings in readiness for the next Mid Wales CJC Formal Meeting on Thursday, 18th January 2024. Expectations are that there will be a Corporate Plan confirmed and out to the public in the early New Year.

PG spoke briefly around the issues of Well-being in future generations again reiterating how it is up to the CJC Board to decide what work is done and how far it is taken. There are resources and timing issues to be taken into consideration also.

In summary and on a positive note, the intent of the Corporate Plan is to be a valuable document for the CJC, used as a framework and communicating clearly to the wider public as well as the Regulators and other partners.

County Councillor Bryan Davies thanked everyone for the excellent CJC Workshop held last week at County Hall, Llandrindod Wells and that all comments have been included in the draft Corporate Plan.

Therefore, happy to propose a recommendation that we approve the draft Corporate Plan today on the proviso that any new comments can be taken into consideration and added before the final Plan is approved.

RECOMMENDATION

- **That the CJC approves the draft Corporate Plan for the consultation exercise to take place.**

County Councillor Bryan Davies proposes that the draft Corporate Plan is approved for the consultation exercise to take place and this was seconded by County Councillor Gareth Ratcliffe.

8.	CJC FINANCE UPDATE
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The Section 151 Officer presented the Report.

1. Outturn position for last financial year 2022-23

This budget is split between the General Budget which relates to Ceredigion and Powys and then the Strategic Planning Budget.

Both budgets show an underspend position, partly because the CJC is in its early stages and constraints were in place whilst awaiting confirmation of VAT reclaim.

Summary of Appendix A presented to meeting.

There should be an audited position of the CJC by the 18th January 2024 meeting.

2. A proposed update in terms of the current year's budget for 2023-24

Budget for the current year has already been approved, proposed amendments under Appendix B need approving.

These include costs in terms of staffing and Audit Wales fees with some minor adjustments re current commitments and projections, e.g., democratic support and translation.

It is proposed to use a small number of reserves carried forward from last year, both on the General and Strategic budgets as shown in the Report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Section 9 in the Report

9.1 a To note the outturn for the General Budget for the Mid Wales CJC for 2022-23, a spend of £61,342 outlined in Appendix B.

b To approve the General Budget for the Mid Wales CJC for 2023-24 of £146,255 as outlined in Appendix B.

County Councillor James Gibson Watt and County Councillor Bryan Davies voted to recommend the above in Section 9.1a of the Report.

County Councillor Bryan Davies, County Councillor James Gibson Watt and County Councillor Gareth Ratcliffe voted to recommend the Section 9.1b of the Report.

9. MEMBERSHIP OF CJC SUB-COMMITTEES - BANNAU BRYCHEINIOG

It was noted that a request had been received from Bannau Brycheiniog to be included in all Sub Committees for all elements associated with the legislation.

To reiterate, there are three pillars underpinning the CJC –

1. Strategic Development Planning where Bannau Brycheiniog must have and do have an input.
2. Economic Development and Regeneration.
3. Regional Transport Planning.

Discussions concluded along with legislation, that input was not required from Bannau Brycheiniog in the Economic Development Group neither does it include the requirement for the Transport link across Mid Wales. The statutory responsibilities for these areas sit solely with Powys CC and Ceredigion CC and not therefore appropriate for Bannau Brycheiniog to sit as part of any discussions within these groups.

The decision was relayed to Bannau Brycheiniog and these have been accepted.

To clarify, Bannau Brycheiniog will remain compliant with the legislation in their presence around the Strategic Development Planning but not with the other two Sub Committees.

GJ, Bannau Brycheiniog is happy with recommendation but to reiterate a clear link between Strategic Development Planning, Regional Transport and the Economic Well Being streams, so where appropriate for the National Park to be included on discussions but not necessarily as a member of the formal Sub Committees.

The National Park has specialisms in specific areas to add value to the CJC, e.g., climate change and biodiversity.

County Councillor Bryan Davies commented that he is happy for Bannau Brycheiniog to be included in discussions as suggested by Gareth Jones.

The Chair confirmed the necessity of including Bannau Brycheiniog in discussions but without being formal members of the Sub Committees.

RECOMMENDATION

County Councillor Gareth Ratcliffe proposed to accept Item 9 of the agenda, i.e., after discussions along with legislation, that input was not required from Bannau Brycheiniog in the Economic Development Group neither does it include the requirement for the Transport link across Mid Wales be approved and this was seconded by County Councillor Bryan Davies.

10.	UPDATE FROM SUB COMMITTEES (RTP / SDP / ECONOMIC WELLBEING)
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EE gave a summary of the Audit Wales Report which raised concerns around progress not being made in all Sub Committees.

Firstly, to record recognition for the work undertaken by several Officers in progressing these Sub Committees to date.

Pressures and timelines have been shared with the Board and the intention to further progress the work necessary for the creation of a Regional Strategic Plan with Sarah Groves-Phillips, Planning Policy Manager leading a virtual team on this.

Second is the Regional Transport Plan under the direction of Ann Elias, TraCC Projects and Programme Manager and documents for consideration are being prepared.

The Regional Transport Plan Sub Committee is meeting on the 23rd October 2023 with the next Mid Wales CJC Formal Meeting on the 18th January 2024 so not possible to seek approval via the usual decision-making process before the cut-off date of 31st October 2023.

- **A request re. authorisation for delegation of decisions for approval of submission to meet the deadline.**
- **We are also requesting funding from Welsh Government to support that work.**

Thirdly, the work around the Economic Well-being focusing on work in relation to the growth deal areas and OECD will be commissioned by Welsh Government and an event has been organised for 27th October 2023 for that purpose.

There are two recommendations for consideration –

- 1. To approve the Regional Transport Plan implementation.**
- 2. Request funding from the Welsh Government.**

County Councillor Gareth Ratcliffe raised concern around the critical timing of Officers feedback for the document by end of October 2023 and asked for sufficient time to be allocated i.e., to provide a Forward Work Programme in this respect.

RECOMMENDATION

1. **To approve the Regional Transport Plan implementation.**
2. **Request funding from the Welsh Government.**

County Councillor Bryan Davies proposed to accept this recommendation and this was seconded by County Councillor James Gibson Watt.

11.	STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN (SDP) LETTER FROM THE MINISTER
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As in the last minutes of the previous CJC Meeting, Officers wrote to Julie James MS, Minister for Climate Change for clarification of the position on Strategic Development Planning.

The letter was responded to by the Minister and this is on the agenda for your information.

12.	DRAFT COMPLIANCE NOTICE WELSH LANGUAGE STANDARDS REGULATIONS NUMBER 1
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As a new entity the CJC will be required to follow the Welsh Language Standards Regulations.

A letter received from the Commissioner sets out the requirements and County Councillor Bryan Davies is looking forward to work closely with Powys on these requirements and to positively promote the Welsh Language across the regions.

The Monitoring Officer pointed out that the Commissioner's letter indicated that a consultation period has commenced and will continue until the 5th January 2024. The CJC will need to complete the consultation exercise by that date and requests clarification around the proposed approval as the Mid Wales CJC is not meeting until 18th January 2024.

EE suggested that Officers meet to discuss and reach an agreement with the Chair and Vice Chair on how best to address this issue.

The Monitoring Officer suggested writing to the Welsh Commissioner and advising that the next meeting of the Mid Wales CJC is not until 18th January 2024 and could an extension be given to this effect.

County Councillor Bryan Davies approves this suggestion and it's a practical way of dealing with the imminent deadline.

ACTION

Officers to draft a jointly prepared response for consideration by the Welsh Commissioner for an extension to the consultation deadline and that this be an item at the next CJC Meeting on 18th January 2024.

13.	ANY OTHER BUSINESS
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None.

14.	DATES OF FUTURE MID WALES CJC FORMAL MEETINGS AND CJC SUB COMMITTEES
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Mid Wales CJC Formal Meetings

Thursday, 18th January 2024 at 11 am to 12.30 pm

Thursday, 9th May 2024 at 2 pm to 3 pm

July 2024 to be arranged

October 2024 to be arranged

CJC Sub Committees (To note)

Strategic Development Planning, Monday, 17th October at 4 pm to 5 pm

Governance and Audit, Thursday, 19th October at 4 pm to 5 pm

Regional Transport Planning, Monday, 23rd October at 4 pm to 5 pm

Standards, Thursday, 9th November at 2 pm to 3 pm

Joint Overview and Scrutiny, Thursday, 16th November at 10 am to 11 am