

## **National Standards Committee Chairs Forum - Wales**

Monday 29th January 2024 @ 2pm, via Team

Stephan Hays' notes

### **Announcement**

Justine Cass Deputy MO of Totrfaen Council. Former CPS lawyer is our legal advisor.

### **The responses to last year's consultation:**

Were supportive of the alignment of procedures

Strong support for the anonymity of witnesses

Would like to see a reform to the appeals process.

Less support for former county councillors then sitting as an independent member and in some cases regardless of the time interval between the two.

### **Michelle Morris - PSOW**

18% increase in cases after a fall from the previous meeting. Currently have 1800 cases. This presents a challenge to undertake.

Also 32% of cases have closed this year.

Problem of completing 15 aged cases (>12 months). Aim is to halve that number.

11 hearings by SC & APW. 9 are pending and these are for SCs Also 1 Tribunal. APW granted an appeal re a SC decision in connection with a Community Council.

Interim referral to APW, first time this has been done. This was for someone who held two positions: a County Councillor and a Community Councillor. APW agreed and resulted to a 6 month suspension.

PSOW may get some more money from WG for extra staff.

Always recommend trying to nip things in the bud before they escalate.

**Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs)** are new corporate bodies which have some similar powers and duties to councils.

They can directly own assets and employ staff. They must appoint a Chief Executive, Finance Officer, and Monitoring Officer. CJCs' membership is made up of the leaders of the councils within the specific region and the National Park Authorities that sit within that region.

Four CJCs were established to help strengthen regional collaboration between authorities:

- South East Wales CJC
- South West Wales CJC
- North Wales CJC
- Mid Wales CJC (Powys & Ceredigion).

They came into effect in April 2021 and were given the following functions from June 2022:

- developing transport policies
- preparing a strategic development plan
- economic wellbeing – anything a CJC considers is likely to promote or improve the economic wellbeing of its area.

As the CJCs are new corporate bodies, we looked at their progress in developing their arrangements to meet their statutory obligations and the Welsh Government's aim of strengthening regional collaboration.

The four CJCs are responsible for **strategic development planning, regional transport planning** and promoting the **economic well-being of their area**. The Welsh Ministers could specify functions on CJCs that relate to **improving education**, but this has not currently been specified within the Regulations.

## **Strategic Development Plans**

Welsh planning law establishes a framework for local planning authorities to bring forward Strategic Development Plans (SDPs). The aim being to deal more effectively with regional cross-boundary issues such as housing and transport, and provide a strategic approach to planning at a greater scale than individual local development plans (LDPs).

CJCs are responsible for preparing the SDPs. Local planning authorities will still prepare LDPs, but these will be more focused in nature.

## **Transport functions**

CJCs are also responsible for developing Regional Transport Plans. These plans will replace local transport plans previously prepared by individual authorities.

The [Transport \(Wales\) Act 2006](#) enabled establishment of Joint Transport Authorities (JTAs). The proposed JTAs would have had their own governance arrangements and constitution, and have powers to develop regional transport strategies within a broader national context. The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 repealed the specific provisions in the 2006 Act to establish JTAs, and for these functions to be incorporated within the new CJs.

## **The economic well-being function**

CJs have the power to promote and improve the economic well-being of their areas. The power may be exercised for the benefit of the whole or part of the CJs area, or all or any person resident in the area. It's anticipated that City or Regional Growth Deals will be subsumed by CJs, although some aspects of this are still to be ironed out.

The City and Growth Deal approach is based on each region setting out and adopting a strategic long-term plan for the economic development of the region. Each deal is underpinned by a 15 or 20 year programme of capital investment designed by the region and supported by local authorities, Welsh and UK governments and other public and private sector funding.

Sets its own budget.

Has to set its own Standards Committee. With own members and its own Code of Conduct. Register of Interests because it covers a larger area.

I asked about joining our SCs in the mid-Wales region. The response was he understood where we were coming from and that this is still a developing organisation.

## **Resourcing of SCs**

Consideration of the level of support offered to SCs offered by CCs and how resourced. Also what level of support that APW might feel is needed for us. There is quite a variation. It is likely a mapping exercise will be undertaken.

For example, hourly rate, if a whole day is expected, but then only an hour of work is undertaken some sort of recompence should be payable.

## **Local Resolutions**

One example was tow arguing members the idea of having to go through a mediation process was enough for them to agree to be civil. Probably better if SCs do not get too involved in local resolution in case the matter ends up before them. Possibly more complaints this year because of the elections.

## **MO's Group**

Allowing group leaders to sit on SCs – possible conflict of interest of judging himself.

Proposed £25 as the limit for gifts and hospitality.

There is an online training on use of social media. To be made available to everyone.

Signing of Civility and Respect Pledge. This is slowly developing, see link.

<https://www.slcc.co.uk/news-publications/civility-respect-pledge/>