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## NORTH WALES CORPORATE JOINT COMMITTEE 23/01/26

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**Present:** Chair: Councillor Mark Pritchard (Wrexham County Borough Council).

**Councillors:** Richard Jones (Flintshire County Council), Nia Jeffreys (Cyngor Gwynedd), Julie Fallon (Conwy County Borough Council), Gary Pritchard (Isle of Anglesey County Council), Jason McLellan (Denbighshire County Council) and Edgar Owen (Chair of Eryri National Park Authority).

**Chief Executives of Constituent Councils:** Dylan Williams (Isle of Anglesey County Council), Rhun ap Iarthur (Conwy County Borough Council), Neal Cockerton (Flintshire County Council), Helen White (Denbighshire County Council), Alwyn Jones (Wrexham County Borough Council) and Jonathan Cawley (Eryri National Park Authority).

**Other officers present:** Alwen Williams (CJC Chief Executive), Hedd Vaughan Evans (Head of Operations), Dewi Morgan (Chief Finance Officer – Cyngor Gwynedd), Sian Pugh (Assistant Head of Finance – Cyngor Gwynedd), Iwan Evans (Monitoring Officer – Cyngor Gwynedd), Iain Taylor (AMION Consulting), Adam Graham (Senior Transport Officer – Ambition North Wales), Andy Roberts (Regional Strategic Development Planning Officer), David Hole (Programme Manager Operation of the CJC), and Annes Sion (Democracy Team Leader – Cyngor Gwynedd).

**Others invited:** David Bithell (Wrexham County Borough Council, Chair of the North Wales CJC Strategic Transport Sub-Committee).

### 1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr Dave Hughes (Flintshire County Council), Dafydd Gibbard (Cyngor Gwynedd) and Claire Incedon (Acting CJC Deputy Monitoring Officer).

Before commencing the meeting Helen White, the new Chief Executive of Denbighshire County Council, was welcomed to her first meeting of this committee.

### 2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

The Monitoring Officer and the Statutory Finance Officer noted a declaration of interest should the discussion proceed to discuss their positions in item 5, and that they would leave the meeting.

### 3. URGENT BUSINESS

None to note.

### 4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS

It was highlighted that one member had noted that they were against excluding the press and public at the meeting on 7 November, and it was asked that the minutes should be amended to draw attention to this. This was accepted, along with the minutes of the

meeting held on 28 November.

## 5. **2026/27 BUDGET, LEVY ON CONSTITUENT AUTHORITIES AND PARTNER CONTRIBUTIONS**

The report was presented by Sian Pugh (Assistant Head of Finance – Cyngor Gwynedd)

### **RESOLVED**

#### **North Wales Corporate Joint Committee**

- To approve the budget for 2026/27 as presented in Appendix 1.
- To approve the levy on the constituent authorities as noted in Appendix 1

#### **Growth Deal**

- To approve the Growth Deal revenue budget for 2026/27 as presented in Appendix 2.
- To approve the funding contributions which include the partner contributions, local authorities' supplementary contributions and partner interest contributions.
- To approve the Growth Deal's capital budget for 2026/27 as presented in Appendix 3.

### **DISCUSSION**

The report was presented highlighting that it was a statutory requirement for the CJC to approve its budget, and the allocation of the levy to the Councils and the Eryri National Park Authority by 31 January. It was noted that the total expenditure budget for 2026/27 as £2.16m and it was highlighted how it was being funded.

It was explained that the levy, which is allocated to the constituent authorities based on the population, had increased by £112,700 for 2026/27 due to inflation of 3.5% and the additional costs in increasing the capacity of the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer. It was noted that to further support governance arrangements across the CJC, a recent review indicated the need for a full-time Monitoring Officer and a Section 151 Officer for 3 days a week as we move forward.

It was highlighted that after using the contribution of almost £625k from the reserves for 2026/27, a balance of approximately £800k would remain in reserves.

Looking at the Growth Deal, it was noted that the spending budget for 2026/27 was £2.95m, with £470k funded by partner contributions, £240k by local authority supplementary contributions, £154k by partner interest contributions, £660k from the Growth Deal grant earmarked for the revenue element, £435k from the Growth Deal grant earmarked from the projects and £987k from the resource fund. It was explained that an increase in partner contributions because of a reduction in the employer's pension contribution rate did not offset the outturn adjustment for 2025/26 and the wage inflation objective for 2026/27.

It was detailed that changes in projects in the capital profile had led to an overall increase in the projected cost of borrowing compared to the calculation made for the 2025/26 budget. It was reiterated that some partners were also leading their projects, and therefore the cost of borrowing had been added to their interest contributions.

It was noted in relation to the capital budget of the Growth Deal that the most recent

expenditure profile had been identified as part of the appendices, and that it was based on the timetable of the most recent projects. It was added that it was being reviewed as the business cases were being approved.

Thanks were extended for the report, and it was noted that it was self-explanatory. It was asked if the use of reserves was sustainable, as this went from year to year. The need for further consideration was noted when formulating a long-term fiscal strategy. It was expressed that they need to be used as it reduced the need to increase the levy on Local Authorities and the National Park.

## **6. 2025/26 REVENUE AND CAPITAL POSITION – END OF DECEMBER 2025 REVIEW**

The report was presented by Sian Pugh (Assistant Head of Finance – Cyngor Gwynedd)

### **RESOLVED:**

To note and accept the end of December 2025 review for:-

- The Corporate Joint Committee (Appendix 1).
- The Economic Well-being Sub-Committee (Growth Deal), including the reserves position (Appendices 2 and 3).
- Growth Deal Capital Plan (Appendix 4)
- The Regional Skills Partnership (Appendix 5).

### **DISCUSSION**

The report was presented stating that it provided an estimate of the financial position of the CJC. It was stated that they estimated an underspend of £959k this year. It was noted that this was an increase from the £411k projected in the July review. It was explained that this was due to the CJC's success in securing a grant budget from the Welsh Government for the Strategic Development Plan and the implementation of the Joint Committee.

Attention was drawn to the Growth Deal, and it was noted that they estimated an underspend of £618k, which again was an increase of from £281k projected in July. It was expressed that this was due to further underspending in employee spending, additional governing roles, the support services of the accountable body and project headings.

It was noted that a revised capital profile for the Growth Deal indicated a net reduction of £7.46m in expected expenditure for 2025/26. It was reiterated that there was a slippage with some projects, although some were progressing and as a result the underspend had been reduced.

It was expressed that given the Regional Skills Partnership budget the situation would be neutral and funded by a Welsh Government grant along with a reserve.

Thanks were extended for the report and the overspending was highlighted, and it was stated that they understood it was due to a lack of appointment to positions. It was asked whether there was a possibility to reduce the contribution of Local Authorities due to the magnitude of the projected underspend. The response noted that the contributions were set out in a funding agreement signed by all the Authorities. It was stated that the underspend would be placed in specific reserves and would be available to finance deficits such as in the Strategic Planning programme budget. It was explained that the money in reserves had been determined by the members last year and would be

discussed again in the end-of-year report to approve the use of the underspend.

Concern was highlighted about the underspend in light of the financial challenges facing Local Government, considering the tight budgets and overspending of frontline services across the region.

It was explained that budgets in the Strategic Development Plan highlighted the use of the reserves to secure a full budget for the 5 years of the Plan. It was highlighted that further information on this matter would be featured in item 9 of today's agenda.

An understanding of the rationale behind putting money in reserves was noted, but that there was a need to ensure that money was not being piled up unnecessarily, and by setting an annual budget without a medium or long term plan, there was a concern that there would be a huge increase in the levy from one year to the next. In response, it was noted that the CJC was a new body and as a result there were unfilled positions. It was emphasised that this report was a forecast and that no decision was being made on the underspend today; this would be decided in the end-of-year report. It was reiterated that the money would be put to specific use over the next few years as the costs of the CJC increased. It was explained that the reserves would hopefully help to keep the levy as low as possible.

A request was made for a comprehensive report for the end-of-year decision, as there were so many concerns about the underspend this year. It was also stressed that there was no certainty what the situation would be following the Welsh Government elections in May.

## **7. STRATEGIC TRANSPORT SUB-COMMITTEE - TERMS OF REFERENCE AND SELF-ASSESSMENT**

The report was presented by the Chair of the Strategic Transport Sub-committee, Councillor David Bithell.

### **RESOLVED:**

To approve the following changes to the Terms of Reference of the Strategic Transport Sub-committee:

- That the requirement to produce a quarterly progress report be replaced by bi-annual reporting.
- That the sub-committee had the delegated power to consider and make recommendations to the CJC on regional transport funding and plan commitments.

To note the feedback from the sub-committee's self-assessment questionnaire.

### **DISCUSSION**

The report was presented noting gratitude for the opportunity to present this as Chair of the Sub-Committee. It was noted that he was reporting back on two reports that had been discussed on 15 December, namely adjustments to the Terms of Reference and reporting back on positive responses received from the Sub-Committee's self-assessment questionnaire.

It was highlighted that the decision sought delegated powers to consider and make recommendations to the CJC on regional transport funding and recently developed plan commitments in the implementation of the Regional Transport Plan. It was explained that the Welsh Government had shared guidance on the development of the Regional

Transport Fund (RTF), which had supported the development of a programme of plans to deliver the Regional Transport Delivery Plan.

Thanks were extended for the report, and it was highlighted that only five members had responded to the self-assessment questionnaire. On behalf of the 6th member it was asked whether a new member had had the opportunity to respond, and whether there was support for new members to be aware of their role and responsibilities. In response, it was noted that the member was new, but that as members they felt there was support but work was continuing to develop to ensure that members received support for their role and responsibilities.

Concerns had been expressed, as in this Committee, of the conflict between work on the Committees and the Sub-committees and their roles locally as Cabinet Members. But it was highlighted that valid points had been raised in the self-assessment, and it was asked whether this would be further reported. It was stated that the response was an internal document to ensure that the necessary support and information was given to members. But as the work progressed there would be a need to look at whether the good practice highlighted could be shared with the Welsh Government.

## **8. REGIONAL TRANSPORT FUND UPDATE**

The report was submitted by Adam Graham, Senior Transport Officer.

### **RESOLVED:**

To note and accept the report.

### **DISCUSSION**

The report was submitted noting that back in November the Joint Committee had approved a draft Plans Programme to be submitted to the Welsh Government. Those plans had been identified and prioritised by the region's Authorities.

Following the submission of the Plans Programme to the Government, it was expressed that comments had been received and a colour rating had been given to each. It had 37 green scores, 43 amber scores and 3 red scores. It was explained that further work had been carried out on plans to respond to the concerns highlighted by the Welsh Government, and they would be submitted again to the Government before the end of the month.

Gratitude was expressed for the report, and it was asked whether the Government had set a response deadline. It was noted in the response that no deadline had been set, but that it would fall prior to the pre-election period and letters would be sent to the Authorities at the start the next financial year.

More information was requested in the report in future as it was too high-level a report and the members and the public required more interpretation.

## **9. FORMAL SUBMISSION OF THE STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN DELIVERY AGREEMENT**

The report was submitted by Andy Roberts, Regional Strategic Planning Officer.

**RESOLVED:**

To formally approve the submission of the SDP Delivery Agreement to the Welsh Government for approval in accordance with Regulation 11(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Strategic Development Plan) (Wales) Regulations 2021.

To provide delegated authority to the Chief Executive of Ambition North Wales in consultation with the Chair of the Strategic Planning Sub-committee to make any minor editorial or formatting amendments to the Delivery Agreement to prepare it for formal submission to Welsh Government.

**DISCUSSION**

The report was presented noting that the Joint Committee, back in September, had approved the Delivery Agreement for the Strategic Plan ready for submission to the Welsh Government, subject to a decision being made on funding for the Strategic Development Plan. Since that meeting, it had been expressed that the process of setting a budget was underway and that a budget had been set for programme 1 of the delivery programme, without affecting the levy. It was emphasised that the submission of the Delivery Agreement to the Government committed the CJC to complete the Plan within 5 years.

The cost of producing the SDP was estimated at £3.276m over the five-year process, or an initial average of £655,272 per annum. However, after considering the revenue overspend, a budget of £597,650 was proposed. It was explained that the position reached with the budget in terms of the very limited impact on the Local Authority levy was a significant achievement, providing the certainty that Members were looking for, and the potential to repeat this at least, as part of the budget-setting exercise for 2027/28. Although a Medium-Term Financial Strategy had not yet been agreed for the CJC, this position was considered to be the best that could be achieved for next year, providing the assurances required to commit to formally submitting the SDP Delivery Agreement for approval by Welsh Ministers.

Thanks were given for the report, and it was noted that this requirement was statutory, and therefore funding was mandatory. It was highlighted that a second look at the budget indicated that they were committed to being as efficient as possible, moving forward. It was reiterated that the Medium-Term Financial Plan would be submitted in the autumn.

**10. NORTH WALES INNOVATION PARTNERSHIP FUND - NORTH WALES INNOVATION BOARD**

The report was presented by Alwen Williams, Chief Executive and Iain Taylor, AMION Consulting.

**RESOLVED:**

To approve the Terms of Reference attached to this report as Appendix 1.  
To submit an Expression of Readiness for a North Wales Local Innovation Partnership Fund proposal.

**DISCUSSION**

The report was presented noting that, last summer, the Joint Committee had welcomed proposals for the North Wales Innovation Board. It was noted that the initial discussion

with the Innovation Board Working Group had considered how a focused board could bring expertise and guidance on innovation themes. The Government had since announced its intention to administer funding for a UK-wide programme of Local Innovation Partnerships.

It was therefore expressed that this report brought these two plans together to be able to present an Expression of Readiness, in the hope that an offer would be made to the CJC inviting the region to prepare a proposal to support innovative plans for north Wales over a period of five years. It was explained that it was significant for the North to develop a structure to look at innovation and push and drive this across the region.

The meeting commenced at 1:30pm and concluded at 3pm

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**CHAIRMAN**