NORTH WALES CORPORATE JOINT COMMITTEE 19/06/26

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

Councillors: Paul Johnson (Flintshire County Council), Nia Jeffreys (Cyngor Gwynedd), Gary Pritchard (Isle of Anglesey County Council), Julie Fallon (Conwy County Borough Council), Jason McLellan (Denbighshire County Council) and Ifor Glyn Lloyd (Chair of Eryri National Park Authority).

Chief Officers of Constituent Councils: Neal Cockerton (Flintshire County Council), Helen White (Denbighshire County Council), Matt Georgiou (Conwy County Borough Council), Alwyn Jones (Wrexham County Borough Council) and Jonathan Cawley (Eryri National Park Authority).

Other officers present: Alwen Williams (Corporate Joint Committee (CJC) Chief Executive), Dewi Morgan (Chief Finance Officer – Cyngor Gwynedd), Sian Pugh (Assistant Head of Finance – Cyngor Gwynedd), Sara Jane Jones (Senior Accountant - Cyngor Gwynedd), Mark Watkins (Monitoring Officer - Ambition North Wales), David Hole (CJC Implementation Programme Manager), Nia Llwyd Lewis, (Service Manager - Welsh Language and Translation, Conwy County Borough Council), Eleri Jones, (Human Resources Advisory Service Manager - Cyngor Gwynedd), Ffion Williams (Senior Executive Officer - Ambition North Wales), Annes Sion (Democracy Team Leader – Cyngor Gwynedd) and Sera Whitley (Democratic Services Officer - Cyngor Gwynedd).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from:

- Councillor Dave Hughes (Flintshire County Council) with Councillor Paul Johnson deputising;
- Dafydd Gibbard (Cyngor Gwynedd)
- Rhun ap Gareth (Conwy County Borough Council) with Matt Georgiou deputising
- Nia Medi Williams (Operations and Resource Manager – Ambition North Wales)
- Adam Graham (Senior Transportation Officer - Ambition North Wales)
- Andy Roberts (Regional Strategic Development Planning Officer)

2. ELECTION OF A CHAIR FOR 2026/27

It was resolved to elect Councillor Mark Pritchard as Chair of the Joint Committee for 2026/27.

3. ELECTION OF A VICE-CHAIR FOR 2026/27

It was resolved to elect Councillor Jason McLellan as Vice-chair of the Joint Committee for 2026/27.

4. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

5. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

6. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meetings held on 20 March 2026 as a true record.

7. MEETINGS PROGRAMME FOR 2026/27

The report was presented by Mark Watkins, Monitoring Officer.

RESOLVED:

To approve and adopt the draft calendar for 2026/27.

DISCUSSION

A programme of meetings for 2026/27 was presented, highlighting the dates and times of proposed meetings for the CJC and its Sub-Committees. It was specified that the programme supported decision-making, transparency, and compliance, and allowed for advance planning of work.

8. CORPORATE PLANNING

The report was presented by Alwen Williams, Chief Executive of the CJC.

RESOLVED:

To defer the decision to get a better understanding from the new Welsh Government about their views in supporting this model of funding the Local Growth Fund. A report was requested at the next meeting.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented, stating that its purpose was to put in order a clear framework for how the CJC will operate, prioritise its resources, and demonstrate accountability as it moves forward to the next stage of regional delivery.

It was confirmed that the Welsh Government had stated its intention for the Corporate Joint Committees in Wales to take regional responsibility for the management of the Local Growth Fund from 2027/28. It was noted that the Welsh Government had provided £200,000 to Ambition North Wales to produce the Regional Growth Deal including the associated preparations for its implementation from April 2027.

It was informed that Ambition North Wales had identified the need for a Corporate Plan, which would set out the vision, priorities and actions, as well as provide the basis for working collaboratively with the region. It was reported that a Vision Statement and a Well-being and Objectives Statement had also been created along with a ten-year Regional Growth Deal as required by the Welsh Government.

Concern was expressed about the tight time-scales in delivering the proposal to show that work had commenced on the creation of a ten-year plan by April 2027. It was confirmed that discussions were ongoing with the Welsh Government regarding the time-scales, given that the different components of the Plan would take time. It was emphasised that engagement with local authorities, partners, and communities was paramount to ensure that the Regional Growth Deal reflected the opportunities and challenges in north Wales.

It was added that the Welsh Government needed a transition plan that sets out how Ambition North Wales will change from the current arrangements, where Cyngor Gwynedd delivers year 1 and the start of year 2, for the CJC to take responsibility for delivering year 3. It was explained that Ambition North Wales was awaiting formal guidance to be published by the Welsh Government, but that they were confident that they would be able to meet the requirements noted. Progress would be reported regularly to the CJC, especially if any delays or challenges arose.

It was noted that some Members disagreed with the Welsh Government's decision to direct funding for the Local Growth Fund through the CJC, particularly as there was a lack of input from local authorities into this decision. However, it was noted that this objection was not a negative reflection of the CJC but rather an objection to the Government's decision.

It was enquired how much more public money would be needed to fund the transformation of the CJC to take responsibility for managing the Local Growth Fund. It was confirmed that the structures for the SPF were in place in Gwynedd and therefore would continue for year 1. It was emphasised that a Welsh Government grant of £200,000 would be used to establish the structures and resources for years 2 and 3.

Clarification was sought for the £65,000 offered to commission a strategic partner to jointly develop documents. It was explained that the figures noted were a proposal of how the grant could be spent. It was confirmed that no work had yet been commissioned or commenced and that Ambition North Wales would work collaboratively with local authorities and partners for the benefit of the region.

A request was made for an update regarding project management capacity at Ambition North Wales. It was clarified that there was currently insufficient capacity in the Ambition North Wales team to support the Local Growth Fund.

In response to concerns about the contribution from local authorities to support and co-produce the Regional Growth Fund, it was explained that the contribution would be £30,000 to the local authorities, and that each of the six local authorities would receive £5,000 for their work. It was noted that this was based on the model created for the SPF, where a contribution from the grant was provided to establish an SPF team within Cyngor Gwynedd.

In response to the discussion, if Members wished, it was confirmed that alternative approaches to the management of the Local Growth Fund could be considered. An alternative approach was discussed, whereby the administration of the Local Growth Fund would remain with the CJC but the task of presenting and commissioning the Local Growth Fund could be delegated to Cyngor Gwynedd or another authority, which would be sensible as the structures and processes had already been developed.

Further concerns were expressed, particularly around capacity and costs, and a recent change in Welsh Government was also highlighted which could lead to a different scheme by the new Government for regional funding and support.

It was proposed that the item be postponed to the next meeting. It was proposed that the CJC would continue discussions with the Welsh Government and reflect the concerns raised during the discussion.

Members and officers were thanked for their input into the discussion.

9. WELSH LANGUAGE STANDARDS ANNUAL REPORT

The report was presented by Nia Medi Williams, Resources and Operations Manager and Nia Llwyd Lewis, Welsh Language and Translation Service Manager (Conwy Council).

RESOLVED:

The Welsh Language Standards Annual Report was approved for publication.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented, highlighting that the purpose of the report was to show the extent to which Ambition North Wales had complied with the Welsh Language Standards in the period between 28 February 2025 and 31 March 2026. It was explained that all the steps taken had contributed to the Welsh Government's target of having one million Welsh speakers by 2050.

The context was provided, explaining that Ambition North Wales had commissioned the work and worked with officers from the Language and Translation Team at Conwy Council to complete the report. The team was thanked for their support.

It was confirmed that Ambition North Wales was a proud, bilingual organisation and already implemented a large number of Welsh language standards. It was highlighted that no complaints had been received from the public or investigations by the Welsh Language Commissioner over the past year, and that all materials on the Ambition North Wales website were available bilingually.

The development of Welsh language skills support for Ambition North Wales staff was reported. It was explained that Welsh language skills had been measured and recorded for the first time, using CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). It was reported that 54% of Ambition North Wales staff were able to speak Welsh, 40% of staff were learning Welsh, and that there were only 2 members of staff with no Welsh skills. It was confirmed that staff were encouraged to use the Welsh language skills they had, whether in the Office or in meetings.

The officers were thanked for the report, and the importance of continuing to use the Welsh language in the workplace was emphasised.

10. COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY

The report was presented by Alwen Williams, Chief Executive of the CJC.

RESOLVED:

The draft Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy was considered and approved for adoption.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented, stating that it was important that a clear and consistent approach for receiving, managing and learning from any complaints or feedback was in place, particularly as the CJC continued to develop its governance arrangements.

It was reported that the policy specified how compliments, comments, and complaints would be handled. It was explained that the policy confirmed informal resolution arrangements, formal investigation, time-lines for response, escalation arrangements, and how lessons to be learned would be collected and recorded to support the service. In addition, it was noted that the policy would also help reduce the risk of: inconsistent handling of complaints; poor record-keeping; avoid escalation to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales; and damage reputation. It was explained that the policy supported transparency, accountability and continuous improvement, and was also in line with the principles of good administration.

It was noted that the policy had been considered by the CJC's Governance and Audit Sub-committee at its meeting on 4 June, where it had been supported and recommended for adoption by the CJC. It was highlighted that two points had been raised, namely the need for a separate document management record for the feedback form, and the creation of a dedicated Welsh and English inbox to receive feedback via e-mail.

11. PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2026/27

The report was presented by Eleri Jones, Human Resources Service Manager.

RESOLVED:

- To adopt the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee's pay policy statement for 2026/27 (Appendix 1).

- To authorise officers to publish the approved Pay Policy Statement on the Ambition North Wales website as soon as reasonably practicable after approval.

DISCUSSION

The Pay Policy Statement 2026/27 was presented stating that it was a statutory duty on the CJC as a public government body to publish a Pay Policy Statement annually. It was explained that this was good practice and ensured that the CJC was transparent in their payment arrangements and in the publication of the working conditions of its staff.

Members were informed that discussions regarding the salary increase of chief executives and all other staff were ongoing. It was reported that a 3.2% increase in the Chief Executive's annual salary had been agreed in July 2025, and later in the summer a 3.2% increase had been agreed for the rest of the staff.

It was further reported that the Welsh Local Government Association had agreed on a 3.3% increase in Chief Executives' salaries for 2026/27, but that they were awaiting confirmation of the level of increase for the rest of the staff.

It was explained that there had been an agreement for point 2 on the salary structure to be abolished, effective from 1 April 2026.

It was recognised that the Travel Policy would need to be updated, to reflect the recent adjustment by HMRC, where the rate had been increased to 55 pence per mile.

It was noted that the Policy emphasised the need to attract and retain staff, ensuring that the CJC remained competitive with its salaries.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that the Pay Policy included all CJC staff and its Sub-committees.

It was asked whether more detail was needed regarding the pay grades and pay structures, and whether the current level of detail reflected in the Pay Policy Statement would be accepted by the CJC's Governance and Audit Sub-committee. It was explained that the current draft was a starting point, and that it was possible to add more information about pay grades and pay structures as the Policy developed. It was confirmed that the information would be presented to Members at the next meeting of the CJC.

12. 2025/26 REVENUE AND CAPITAL OUT-TURN POSITION

The report was presented by Dewi A. Morgan, Head of Finance (CJC Statutory Officer) and Sian Pugh, Assistant Head of Finance.

RESOLVED:

- The CJC's out-turn position for 2025/26 (Appendix 1) was noted and accepted, including the transfer of £1,067,414 to the reserve to fund future budgets.
- The Growth Deal's out-turn position for 2025/26 (Appendix 2) was noted and accepted. Due to the reported underspending, in order to demonstrate a neutral position for the year, it was not necessary to use £60,990 of the reserve budgeted for it in 2025/26, and an amount of £867,731 from the North Wales Growth Deal grant would be used, which was less than budgeted.
- The Growth Deal's reserves position was noted and accepted (Appendix 3).
- The Growth Deal's capital end-of-year review as of 31 March 2026 (Appendix 4) was noted and accepted.
- The Investment Zone's out-turn position for 2025/26 (Appendix 5) was noted and accepted.
- The Regional Skills Partnership's out-turn position for 2025/26 (Appendix 6) was noted and accepted.
- The above was noted and accepted subject to further reports to provide further information regarding:
  - .1. CJC staff over the last three years on plans moving forward;
  - .2. Providing an analysis of the underspend on the use of reserves over the next few years along with the required percentage of reserves;
  - .3. And any financial obligations of delaying the levy for 2027-28.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented, detailing the revenue and capital out-turn position of the CJC for 2025/26.

It was explained that the total net out-turn position for the Strategic Planning, Transport and Corporate elements in nature had underspent by £1.067 million. It was elaborated that £600 thousand of this underspend had come from grants received from the Welsh Government during the year.

The Growth Deal out-turn position per expenditure heading and the corresponding funding streams for the year were detailed, noting that the total underspend was £543k with the main underspend under the heading 'employees'.

It added that an interest reserve of £5m had been set aside to fund borrowing costs in the coming years as expenditure on the capital schemes had commenced before receiving grant funding from the Government. It was clarified that the balance of the resources reserve as of 31 March 2026 was £4.4m, and almost one million of this fund had been earmarked for use in the 2026/27 budget.

A year-end review of the Growth Deal capital programme for 2025/26 was presented followed by a spending profile from 2026/27 onwards. It was highlighted that a total of £30.64 million of expenditure had been made on the Growth Deal by the end of 2025/26. A net reduction of £14.28m was noted in expenditure for 2025/26 compared to the budget approved in February 2025 due to projects slipping.

The Investment Zone's actual expenditure and income were reported, noting a neutral out-turn position for 2025/26. It was noted that the financial position of the Regional Skills Partnership also showed a neutral position for the year, with the expenditure of £290k being funded by a Welsh Government grant.

Concern was expressed about putting over £1 million into the reserves while local authorities were in such serious financial positions and the constant need to justify the expenditure of public money.

It was enquired if local authorities could delay the levy for 2027/28, which would still leave £700,000 in reserves. It was expressed that any proposal would be considered by the CJC, but that no financial advice could be provided without an opportunity to gather the relevant information and costs. It was explained that it would not be possible to fund all proposals but that taking a break from levy charging in 2027/28 would be a serious issue that would likely result in a financial risk to the CJC.

It was highlighted that the medium-term financial plan would be produced over the summer, with the budget coming into force following its approval by the CJC in September 2026. It was confirmed that a proportion of the reserves would be used to keep the levy as low as possible for 2026/27.

Concern was noted about a high level of reserves, potential future underspending, and the fact that the CJC did not have a reserves policy. It was confirmed that a policy could be developed that would outline the level of reserves considered acceptable. It was acknowledged that the current level of reserves was higher than recommended although it was explained that the level of reserves should be systematically reduced.

It was emphasised that £600k of the reserve had already been committed for 2026/27. It was noted that the overall role of the CJC was to develop the North Wales economy, highlighting that the CJC was under scrutiny by the Welsh and UK Governments, and failure to deliver the projects could result in significant risk.

It was highlighted that the CJC was responsible for investing £400 million of public sector funding in major capital projects. Members were asked to consider that these projects would create 10,000 new jobs in the North Wales economy over the next ten years and would also attract a total investment of up to £2 billion in North Wales. It was explained that the work of the CJC enabled economic growth and the delivery of high-value projects. It was stressed that withholding or reducing funding for these projects would result in projects not being delivered and jobs not being created.

It was asked if the decision could be postponed until the next meeting of the CJC in September 2026 in order to receive all additional information. Given that a large amount of the CJC's underspend is staffing related, it was requested that members be given the opportunity to review employee expenditure looking at staff growth, as well as review projected plans for the future. It was stressed that a better understanding was needed for 2026/27 to justify any levy.

It was emphasised that if they were not willing to accept any of the formal recommendations in the decision sought, the CJC would not be able to produce the formal statement of accounts for 2025/26. It was noted that it was vital that the accounts for 2025/26 be prepared, and therefore it was proposed that the wording of the decision sought could be amended to reflect the request for further information on the reserves earmarked, and to ensure that it was presented to members at the next meeting of the CJC.

13. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT 2025/26

The report was presented by Dewi A. Morgan, Head of Finance (CJC Statutory Finance Officer) and Delyth Jones-Thomas, Investment Manager.

RESOLVED:

To accept the report for 2025/26.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented, highlighting that the purpose of the report was to provide an overview of the CJC's treasury management activities during the 2025/26 financial year. It was reiterated that £1.9m of interest on investments had been received from the capital money.

It was confirmed that the CJC was in a strong position as of 31 March 2026, with investments worth £56.4 million. It was clarified that this was mainly capital money from the Growth Deal and Investment Zone that had not yet been spent.

It was stressed that the purpose of Treasury Management was to make the best use of the balances that needed to be invested, until the money was needed in the CJC's business purse. It was explained that the CJC invested in banks, building societies, local authorities, money market funds, and the debt management office. It was noted that the priority of these investments was security, followed by liquidity and growth.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that Arlingclose had contributed parts of the narrative in the Treasury Management Outturn Report. It was further confirmed that the

CJC now had an agreement with Arlingclose, which was separate from Arlingclose's agreement with Cyngor Gwynedd.

Assurances were sought as to which banks, money market funds, and local authorities the CJC invested in and whether their ethical investment policies were in line with the ethos and values of the CJC and the six local authorities. It was explained that all the banks in which the CJC invested had been listed in the Treasury Management Strategy when it was adopted by the CJC in 2025.

Assurance was provided that the CJC did not invest in any organisation that does not share its ethics and values and would consider any concerns raised by members. It was confirmed that it would be sensible for the CJC to have an Ethical Investment Strategy, and the CJC's Governance and Audit Sub-committee could push this work forward.

It was confirmed that a list of the banks, money market funds, and local authorities covered within the Treasury Management Strategy would be included in any update, in order to ensure transparency and integrity. It was further confirmed that these updates would also be submitted regularly to the CJC's Governance and Audit Sub-committee.

The meeting commenced at 13:30 and concluded at 15:45.

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(Chair)