

NORTH WALES CORPORATE JOINT COMMITTEE 28/11/25

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

Councillors: Dave Hughes (Flintshire County Council), Menna Trenholme (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: Dafydd Gibbard (Cyngor Gwynedd), Dylan Williams (Isle of Anglesey County Council), Rhun ap Gareth (Conwy County Borough Council), Neal Cockerton (Flintshire County Council), Graham Boase (Denbighshire County Council), Alwyn Jones (Wrexham County Borough Council) and Jonathan Cawley (Eryri National Park Authority)

Other officers present: Alwen Williams (CJC Chief Executive), Sian Pugh (Assistant Head of Finance – Cyngor Gwynedd), Delyth Jones-Thomas (Investment Manager – Cyngor Gwynedd), Iwan Evans (Monitoring Officer – Cyngor Gwynedd), Sara Jane Jones (Senior Accounting Officer – Cyngor Gwynedd), Claire Incledon (CJC Interim Deputy Monitoring Officer), Iain Taylor (AMION Consulting), Adam Graham (Senior Transport Officer – Ambition North Wales), Matthew Edwards (Audit Wales), and Sera Whitley (Democracy Services Officer – Cyngor Gwynedd).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Nia Jeffreys (Cyngor Gwynedd) and Dewi Aeron Morgan (CJC Statutory Finance Officer).

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

There were no declarations of personal interest.

3. URGENT BUSINESS

None to note.

4. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19 SEPTEMBER 2025

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting held on 19 September 2025 as a true record.

5. NORTH WALES ECONOMIC AMBITION BOARD'S STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS FOR 2024/25 AND RELEVANT AUDIT

The report was presented by Sian Pugh, Assistant Head of Finance.

RESOLVED:

To consider and approve the ISA 260 report by Audit Wales for the NWEAB.

To consider and approve NWEAB's final Statement of Accounts (post-audit) for 2024/25.

DISCUSSION

The final accounts of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board for 2024/25 were submitted, together with the external auditor's report, namely the ISA260 report. It was explained that the functions of the Economic Ambition Board had transferred to the Corporate Joint Committee (CJC) since 1 April 2025, and this was the final statement of accounts, and would be included as part of the Corporate Joint Committee's Statement of Accounts from 2025/26 onwards.

It was assured that the annual Statement of Accounts had been prepared in accordance with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting. It was highlighted that the members had received the information twice already.

It was explained that statements had now been reviewed by Audit Wales, the external auditors. It was highlighted that the auditor intended to issue an unqualified audit opinion on this year's accounts once they had received a Letter of Representation based on what is set out in Appendix 4 of the auditors' report.

Attention was drawn to one error that had not been corrected because an invoice from one supplier could not be allocated to 2024/25 and 2025/26 expenditure, but it did not have a material impact on the accounts. It was explained that pages 86 and 87 showed a summary of the corrections made. It was elaborated that the first correction derived from a payment run made on 31 March; it had been shown as "creditors" and money in the bank as the money had not gone out of the account, but the auditors considered it should be included as "cash in transit" as there was no current commitment in respect of the debt at the end of 31 March. It was acknowledged that this was a technical issue and did not affect the opinion of the audit. The second reference related to the information in Note 24, and did not affect the figures in the accounts themselves.

It was noted that the plan for the year had been submitted to the Joint Committee back in September. The outcome of the audit was presented, and it was noted that it was positive and concluded the former North Wales Economic Ambition Board.

Reference was made to the independence risk of the Audit team due to the relationship of an Audit Manager with a member of the executive group. It was acknowledged that Audit Wales was satisfied with the arrangements to avoid risk.

The team at Audit Wales were thanked for their work on the audit and the team in Cyngor Gwynedd's Finance Department for their work in preparing the Statement of Accounts.

The Chair, together with Cyngor Gwynedd's Head of Finance (as the Statutory Finance Officer of the Corporate Joint Committee), were asked to electronically sign the Accounts and Letter of Representation (Appendix 4 of the report of the Auditor General for Wales) following consideration of the above by the Joint Committee before sending them to Audit Wales.

6. NORTH WALES CORPORATE JOINT COMMITTEE ANNUAL RETURN 2024/25

The report was presented by Sian Pugh, Assistant Head of Finance.

RESOLVED:

To approve the CJC's revised Annual Return for 2024/25 (following external audit). It had been duly completed and certified by the Statutory Finance Officer for the CJC (Appendix 1).

DISCUSSION

It was reported that the Corporate Joint Committee's Annual Return 2024/25 was being presented to the Members, following an audit by Audit Wales. It was highlighted that this Return had been submitted to the Corporate Joint Committee in draft form along with an out-turn report on 13 June.

As with the Economic Ambition Board's accounts, it was noted that there had been a change to the Return due to the payments run, worth £13 thousand, which had run on 31 March. It was explained that this amount had been shown as "creditors" and money in the bank as the money had not gone out of the account, but the auditors were again of the view that it should be included as "cash in transit" as there was no current commitment in respect of the debt at the end of 31 March.

The Chair was asked to sign the Return before it was sent to Audit Wales, and the Corporate Joint Committee was asked to approve the revised CJC Annual Return for 2024/25 (following external audit). It was noted that it had been duly completed and certified by the CJC's Statutory Finance Officer.

The officer was thanked for the update.

7. TREASURY MANAGEMENT 2025/26 - MID YEAR REVIEW

The report was presented by Delyth Jones-Thomas, Cyngor Gwynedd's Investment Manager.

RESOLVED:

To note and accept the report for information.

DISCUSSION

It was highlighted that the members had approved the Corporate Joint Committee's treasury management strategy for the 2025/26 period at its June 2025 meeting. It was explained that the Corporate Joint Committee was required to have a regular update on the situation, and this update looked at the period up to 30 September 2025.

It was noted that it had been a busy time in the financial markets. Attention was drawn to section 6, where financial investments had been reported on behalf of the Joint Committee including:

- banks and building societies
- local authorities
- money market funds
- debt management office

It was stressed that it was required to invest Corporate Joint Committee funds prudently, taking into account the security and liquidity of its investments before attempting the

highest rates of return. It was detailed that the objective in investing money was to strike the right balance between risk and return, ensuring that liquidity was available to pay for the day-to-day operations of the Joint Committee. It was noted that the returns over the period had been acceptable between 3.4% and 4.1%.

It was reported that the Joint Committee had investment restrictions, and this was in order to spread the risk over different organisations. It was confirmed that there had been full compliance with the restrictions.

It was noted that officers were attending ongoing training with Arlingclose, the financial advisers, to understand market conditions.

8. TRANSFORMATION AND IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME 2025-26 UPDATE

The report was presented by Alwen Williams, Chief Executive and Dave Hole, Programme Lead.

RESOLVED:

To note the progress update and the current challenges with the ongoing transformation and continuous improvement of the CJC during 2025/26.

To instruct that a further report be presented in March 2026 to update on 2025/26 programme delivery, including the new proposed programme for 2026/27.

DISCUSSION

The Transformation and Improvement Programme 2025/26 was presented. It was noted that the purpose of the report was to update CJC Members on current progress, challenges and the next steps for the CJC's ongoing transformation and improvement.

Members were provided with context and reminded that the CJC now operated as an established corporate entity with the authority to employ staff and enable robust governance arrangements. Members were reminded that the Growth Deal, its funding, and its employees had been transferred to the CJC and the Ambition North Wales brand in April 2025, with the launch of a revised and ambitious programme for 2025/26 which built on the CJC's action plan and delivered a programme of continuous improvement. Furthermore, it was noted that the Chief Executive had been appointed in June 2025 and acted as the senior responsible owner for the Transformation and Improvement Programme.

It was highlighted that the programme was ambitious, and the key challenges were listed, including the ability to recruit and retain skilled staff, completing the service level agreements currently in place with Cyngor Gwynedd, managing resource capacity alongside normal business operations, and operating within the budgetary constraints assigned.

External factors that had impacted on progress were further listed, including delays in the launch of the Welsh Government's prospectus, and grant allocations. It was expressed that projects such as implementing committee management and webcasting had been postponed due to these dependencies, but these would continue to be resolved in the coming months.

It was noted that the development of a new, forward-looking programme of change was underway, and a roadmap for subsequent years would continue to be developed. The

key priorities would reflect change within the programme, and these were listed in section 5.6 of the report.

It was elaborated that the programme was supported by internal and external resources, both in terms of financial and governance considerations. It was noted that budgets and grant funding had been identified, but as organisational needs evolved there may be potential to request additional funding. It was confirmed that the responses of statutory officers confirmed the accuracy of the information and highlighted the ongoing challenge of balancing capacity with transformation requirements.

Members were informed that in order to ensure good governance and corporate accountability, the CJC must receive regular updates on transformation and improvement activities.

Concerns about staff retention and recruitment were noted, and it was highlighted as a potential problem for the future. It was elaborated that resources were scarce in north Wales, particularly in areas of expertise such as procurement and policy, and it was essential not to take resources from local authorities. It was confirmed that the Chief Executive intended to highlight recruitment challenges in the report for March 2026.

Concern was expressed that recruitment was a challenge facing all local authorities. It was reported that the Chief Executive was in discussions with the Welsh Government to identify individuals with relevant skills to work with the CJC on secondment. Furthermore, it was noted that the CJC needed to be as flexible as possible with its recruitment to ensure proper resources.

In terms of underspending, it was asked if there were plans to be implemented in north west Wales; it was agreed that the Chair and Chief Executive would hold a meeting with the member to explain the plans further.

Gratitude was expressed for the update.

9. STRATEGIC TRANSPORT SUB COMMITTEE QUARTERLY REPORT

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

RESOLVED:

To note the report and its appendix.

DISCUSSION

It was reported that the Quarterly Report had been submitted to the Strategic Transport Sub-committee at the meeting on 6 October. It was noted that the Quarterly Report was being presented to the CJC to note the work completed by the Sub-committee and by the officers working on the Regional Transport Plan.

Due to the nature of the way work was progressing, it was explained that some of the content in the Quarterly Report was now outdated, but attention was drawn to the content that had changed since then, namely:

- The Regional Transport Plan had been approved by the Cabinet Secretary for Transport and North Wales and it had now been approved by the Welsh Government.
- The Proposed Programme of Schemes, relating to a Regional Transport

Fund, had been submitted to the Welsh Government last week and was therefore now awaiting feedback from the Welsh Government.

It was agreed that the Chair of the Strategic Transport Sub-committee would be invited to future meetings to present quarterly reports.

10. FLINTSHIRE AND WREXHAM INVESTMENT ZONE - YEAR 1 ANNUAL DELIVERY PLAN

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

RESOLVED:

The following items were considered for approval:

- The investment allocations of the Annual Delivery Plan**
- The Investment Zone Programmes as set out in Section 3 of this report**
- The Terms of Reference for the Flintshire and Wrexham Investment Zone Working Group (Appendix 1)**
- That the CJC's Section 151 Officer is permitted to sign and issue the Annual Delivery Plan documents to the UK Government and Welsh Government and make any further non-material amendments necessary to agree the ADP with both Governments.**

DISCUSSION

The Year 1 Annual Delivery Plan for the Flintshire and Wrexham Investment Zone was reported. It was noted that this was an exciting opportunity for Flintshire and Wrexham, and for the whole of north Wales. It was elaborated that this would achieve enhanced global status in the Advanced Manufacturing sector in north Wales.

It was reported that the Investment Zone was now in the delivery phase. Members were reminded that a delivery plan must be set each year, and the intention was to deliver the output of the programme in each year. Members were informed that approval was being sought for the current year's delivery plan, which had commenced in April 2025.

It was explained that approval would enable the CJC to submit the Year 1 Annual Delivery Plan, which would trigger the signed final Memorandum of Understanding and the grant offer letter for year one funds. It was elaborated that preparatory work would commence on the Year 2 Annual Delivery fund, and would be starting in April 2026. It was explained that this would be submitted to the Flintshire and Wrexham Working Group and also to the CJC.

It was detailed that the programme was well established, and that it covered skills, business support, infrastructure, etc. An intention was noted to work with partners across north Wales, and for partners to deliver innovation development programmes and proposals for key partnerships with manufacturing companies and for the further design and development of the decarbonisation programme.

It was reported that proposals from Coleg Cambria and Wrexham University had been received for the first phase of the skills programme, and these would be shared with the Regional Skills Partnership. It was stated that the CJC would decide on the skills programme as it progressed. It was elaborated that the intention was to enter into funding agreements to launch a business support programme in Flintshire and

Wrexham, which would see businesses there apply for grant and support.

It was stated that the report noted high-level activities and financial allocations for the first two years. The need to consider year one allocations was emphasised at this meeting.

It was added that decisions regarding the Investment Zone would be evaluated and agreed with the leaders of Flintshire and Wrexham, but the report would be finally agreed by the CJC. A mandate would be given to the CJC's Statutory Finance Officer to sign-off on the Annual Delivery Plan provided that any insignificant adjustments were made at his discretion and submitted back to the CJC.

They were thanked for the update. Concern was expressed about a lack of engagement with schools and young people, particularly around apprenticeships and the opportunity for young people to engage with the project. Pride was also expressed in seeing the Regional Skills Partnership included in the project, especially to support the working for the region project. It was noted that the skills agenda would have to take a regional approach and not just Flintshire and Wrexham. It was agreed that it was important for local authorities to work together to support the success of the Investment Zone.

It was enquired about the Investment Zone Advisory Board, and how it fitted within the governance structure. In response, the consultant was asked to send an e-mail to all Members with details of the Investment Zone Advisory Board and a diagram of the governance structure. It was noted that Investment Zones were required to have independent advisory boards to be able to take advice and recommendations on the strategic direction, and it was noted that it was intended to report quarterly to this group. It was confirmed that the CJC was the accountable body for all decisions.

Thanks were expressed to all the officers.

11. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Chair proposed to exclude the press and public from the meeting during the discussion on the following items due to the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972: Information about the financial or business transactions of any specific person (including the authority that retains that information).

There is an acknowledged public interest in openness in relation to the use of public resources and related financial issues. It is also acknowledged that there are occasions, in order to protect the financial and commercial interests that matter related to such information need to be discussed without being publicised. The report is specific about agreeing appointment arrangements including job details and conditions and terms of pay that will be subject to a competitive recruitment process.

12. APPOINTMENT OF A PORTFOLIO DIRECTOR FOR THE CORPORATE JOINT COMMITTEE

The report was presented by Alwen Williams, Chief Executive.

RESOLVED:

To agree to advertise the post of Portfolio Director on a permanent full-time basis, at an annual salary at a scale of up to £93,163.

To authorise the commencement of a recruitment process to appoint a Portfolio

Director.

To agree that the recruitment process, including the advertising, would be delegated to the Chief Executive.

To adapt the linguistic requirements in the Job Description to include that the ability to speak and write in Welsh is desirable rather than essential.

DISCUSSION

The report was discussed.

The meeting commenced at 14:00 and concluded at 15:15

CHAIRMAN