NORTH WALES CORPORATE JOINT COMMITTEE
25/09/2026

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

Councillors: Dave Hughes (Flintshire County Council), Nia Jeffreys (Cyngor Gwynedd), Nicola Roberts (Isle of Anglesey County Council), Chris Cater (Conwy County Borough Council), Hugh Evans (Denbighshire County Council), and Ifor Glyn Lloyd (Chair of Eryri National Park Authority).

Chief Executives of Constituent Councils: David Fitzsimon (Flintshire County Council), Helen White (Denbighshire County Council), Rhun ap Gareth (Conwy County Borough Council), Alwyn Jones (Wrexham County Borough Council), Dylan Williams (Isle of Anglesey County Council), Dafydd Gibbard (Cyngor Gwynedd), and Jonathan Cawley (Eryri National Park Authority).

Other officers present: Alwen Williams (Chief Executive of the Corporate Joint Committee (CJC)), Hedd Vaughan-Evans (Portfolio Director – Ambition North Wales), Dewi Morgan (Chief Finance Officer – Cyngor Gwynedd), Sian Pugh (Assistant Head of Finance – Cyngor Gwynedd), Sara Jane Jones (Senior Accountant – Cyngor Gwynedd), Mark Watkins (Head of Legal Services / Interim Monitoring Officer – Ambition North Wales), Helen Edwards (Deputy Monitoring Officer – Ambition North Wales), David Hole (Corporate Joint Committee Implementation Programme Manager), Adam Graham (Senior Transport Officer – Ambition North Wales), Yvonne Thomas (Audit Manager – Audit Wales), Siwan Glyn (Audit Wales), Elen Wyn Owen (Corporate Support Officer – Ambition North Wales), Rhodri Jones (Democracy Services Officer – Cyngor Gwynedd), and Sera Whitley (Democracy Services Officer – Cyngor Gwynedd).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from:

- Councillor Julie Fallon (Conwy County Borough Council) with Councillor Chris Cater deputising
- Councillor Gary Pritchard (Isle of Anglesey County Council) with Councillor Nicola Roberts deputising
- Neal Cockerton (Flintshire County Council) with David Fitzsimon deputising
- Ffion Williams (Senior Operations Officer – Ambition North Wales)

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

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

It was decided to elect Councillor Gary Pritchard as Vice-Chair of the Joint Committee for 2026/27.

4. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

5. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting held on June 19 2026 as a true record.

6. GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2025/26

The report was presented by Mark Watkins, CJC Head of Legal Services/Monitoring Officer.

RESOLVED:

The Annual Governance Statement 2025/26 at Appendix 1 was approved as the Corporate Joint Committee's statement on internal control for the purposes of Regulation 5 of the Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014 (as amended).

The Governance Improvement Plan for 2026/27 contained in the Statement was noted and approved.

To authorise the Chair and Chief Executive to sign the Annual Governance Statement.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented, noting that the Annual Governance Statement recorded the outcome of the annual review of Ambition North Wales's governance and internal control arrangements. It was reported that the conclusion confirmed that the governance framework provided a reasonable basis for the lawful, accountable, and effective discharge of the organisation's functions during 2025-26.

It was further explained that the Statement provided reasonable assurance rather than absolute assurance as Ambition North Wales was an organisation that was still maturing, and was intentionally honest about some arrangements that were still being developed. It was explained that these arrangements, which included corporate risk management, constitutional framework and decision-making, ethical governance, and service resilience, were included in the Governance Improvement Plan along with the responsible officers and target dates. It was confirmed that the Governance Improvement Plan's progress would be reported regularly to the CJC.

It was explained that the Annual Governance Statement was due to be presented to the Governance and Audit Sub-Committee on 15 September, but due to quorum issues the meeting had been postponed. It was confirmed that the Annual Governance Statement would be submitted to the Governance and Audit Sub-Committee once a new date had been confirmed, and that any recommendations from the Sub-Committee would be reported to the CJC.

Clarification was sought regarding the reference in the Annual Governance Statement to the CJC's scrutiny arrangements. It was confirmed that the CJC was in the process of assisting the constituent councils in establishing a Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee, although matters such as the Growth Deal had already been discussed within local authority scrutiny committees. It was clarified that it was a matter for the constituent councils to establish the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee or to establish any formal scrutiny arrangements. Following a recent meeting with the chief executives of the constituent councils, it was explained that they had asked the CJC's Monitoring Officer to provide more

details regarding the specific capacity required by the constituent councils, to better understand how resources could be provided.

It was noted that in the absence of any formal scrutiny committee, the responsibility fell on local scrutiny committees in each constituent council to carry out the scrutiny functions if they wished to do so. However, it was noted that the CJC's Governance and Audit Sub-Committee and the regular reporting mechanisms, which formed part of the performance management framework, were already undertaking some scrutiny work.

In response to a question regarding the timetable for establishing the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee, it was reiterated that it was a matter for the constituent councils to establish any formal scrutiny arrangements. It was noted that while there was no legal obligation to do so, there was an expectation from the Welsh Government that there should a formal scrutiny arrangement in place. It was pointed out that each of the constituent councils already had functioning scrutiny committees, and if they wished to scrutinise a particular matter relating to the CJC's business, they were free to do so. However, it was acknowledged that governance weakness existed because as yet there was no coordinated regional arrangement.

7. NORTH WALES CORPORATE JOINT COMMITTEE'S STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS FOR 2025/26 AND RELEVANT AUDIT

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

RESOLVED:

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

To consider and approve the CJC's Final Statement of Accounts for 2025/26 (post-audit).

DISCUSSION

The final accounts of the CJC were submitted, together with the ISA260 report, namely the external auditor's report for Ambition North Wales – Audit Wales. It was reported that the annual Statement of Accounts had been prepared in accordance with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting, which was one of matters under scrutiny by Audit Wales.

It was explained that 2025/26 was a key year in the preparation of the statement of accounts as it was the first time that the CJC had been deemed to be a larger relevant body following the handover of the Growth Deal, leading to the requirement to prepare a full set of accounts.

It was highlighted that the information in the Statement of Accounts had already been submitted to the CJC at its June meeting, in the Revenue and Capital out-turn position for 2025/26.

It was explained that the statements had now been reviewed by Audit Wales. It was confirmed that the auditor intended to issue an unconditional audit opinion on this year's accounts once the CJC had provided a Letter of Representation to Audit Wales. It was

clarified that the Chair and Section 151 Officer were required to sign the Letter of Representation.

Attention was drawn to the significant work and preparation that had taken place as part of the audit process, and that the statement of accounts was complex and lengthy. It was noted that the process was more complex than expected as they were the CJC's first set of full accounts, and that additional audit work was required to respond to the risks identified in the report.

Members were informed that when the report was circulated, some elements of the audit were still underway, although it was confirmed that this work had now been completed and that no additional issues arose as a result.

It was noted that Audit Wales had reassessed the basis for material-level accounts following the receipt of the draft accounts, and that they now used growth assets instead of expenditure growth. It was confirmed that this ensured that the approach used was more appropriate to the nature of the organisation.

It was noted that some amendments had been made to the notes on the accounts. It was confirmed that these corrections had been included in the version of the accounts submitted to members at today's meeting, and that they did not affect the overall financial position. It was further explained that there were no significant issues to report to the CJC and it was confirmed that this was a positive outcome and provided robust assurance.

The officers and auditor involved in the process were thanked for their time and efforts.

8. 2026/27 REVENUE AND CAPITAL POSITION – END OF JULY 2026 REVIEW

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

RESOLVED:

Resolved:

- To note and accept the revenue end of July 2026 review for the CJC (Appendix 1), including a maximum of £39,874 to be transferred from the reserve (in addition to the £624,590 that was approved in the 2026/27 budget) to leave a neutral position (with the final figure to be confirmed when the 2026/27 out-turn report is presented).

- To note and accept the revenue and capital end of July 2026 review for the Growth Deal (Appendix 2), including the reserves position (Appendix 3).

- To note and accept the Growth Deal’s revised capital expenditure profile (Appendix 4).

- To note and accept the end of July 2026 review for the Investment Zone (Appendix 5), including the use of the interest on Investment Zone balances to leave a neutral position for 2026/27.

- To note and accept the revenue end of July 2026 review for the RSP (Appendix 6).

- To approve the virements for the CJC, Growth Deal and Investment Zone budgets noted in Appendix 7.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented, detailing projections of the CJC's revenue and capital out-turn position for 2026/27.

It was explained that the report detailed a projected out-turn position of the Strategic Planning, Transport and Corporate elements, with an overspend of almost £40,000 forecast by the end of the financial year.

The projected revenue position of the Growth Deal was presented, forecasting an underspend of £288,000 by the end of the financial year. It was noted that this was due to underspending on staff costs, additional governance roles, accountable body support services, and external support in the legal, financial and procurement areas for the projects.

It was highlighted that if the underspend remained at the end of the financial year, the grant contributions drawn from the Growth deal or reserves would be adjusted to achieve a neutral position for the year. It was confirmed that these income sources would then be available to fund future budgets and mitigate any increase in partner contributions. It was further clarified that partner contributions – which accounted for approximately 25% of the budget – were the only permanent sources of funding, while the other sources were only temporary.

The Growth Deal fund balances were presented as at 31 March 2026, the movements during the year, and the forecast balances for 31 March 2027. It was explained that the £5million interest reserve was ringfenced to fund future borrowing costs, covering the period when expenditure on capital schemes was stimulated prior to the receipt of grant funding from the Government. It was further explained that the resources reserve had been allocated to cover government requirements, project development costs, and maintaining the capacity of the Portfolio Management Office.

A revised capital profile for the Growth Deal was presented, noting that while expenditure of £51.26 million had been forecast for 2026/27, this was £15.81 million less than the budget profile approved in January. It was pointed out that this was a result of project slippages, however, the delivery of the Business Gateway project and expenditure on reserve list projects had reduced that delay.

It was further noted that the report set out the projected expenditure and income for the Investment Zone, and the projected financial position for the Regional Skills Partnership. It was confirmed that both projected a neutral position for the year.

9. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY AND PLAN 2026/27 - 2029/30

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

RESOLVED:

To provide guidance to officers on the CJC’s appetite towards the use of reserves when preparing the budget for 2026/27.

It was resolved to ask officers to provide a hybrid option using 80% of the estimated usable reserves available on 31 March 2027 as a basis, which would mean presenting an option falling between option 3 and option 4 to Members at the next CJC meeting.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented, drawing attention to an error in paragraph 2.1 of the decision sought, where it referred to preparing a budget for 2026/27. It was explained that the budget for 2026/27 had already been set in January 2026 and that the decision sought should refer to setting the budget for 2027/28.

Members were informed that this was the first time the Mid Term Financial Strategy had been presented to the CJC, and it was hoped that they could see that it represented the financial officers' forecast for the CJC's resource requirements for the next three years.

Four strategic principles were presented in relation to Ambition North Wales's financial planning.

- The CJC will assess decisions over the full planning timeline, aligning resources and commitments with statutory responsibilities and agreed regional priorities.
- The CJC will manage income, reserves, cash flow, treasury, borrowing and contingencies as an integrated system of financial resilience.
- The CJC will ensure that organisational capacity, capability, governance arrangements and financial resources develop in step with its expanding statutory responsibilities, programme portfolio and role as a corporate public body.
- The CJC will make assumptions, risks, choices and accountabilities visible, supporting informed Member decisions and early engagement with levy-paying bodies.

It was stressed that this report was not a budget for the 2027/28 financial year, as that would be submitted to the CJC for a final decision at its meeting in January 2027, following consideration by the Governance and Audit Sub-committee in December 2026. It was confirmed that the purpose of this report was to provide members with an outline of the likely budget for 2027/28, and provide an opportunity for members to provide guidance to officers as part of the process of preparing the budget.

Members were reminded that they had requested further information from officials at the CJC meeting in June, regarding: the CJC's staffing levels over the last three years and plans for the future; an analysis of the underspend and use of reserves for the next year, together with the required percentage of reserves; and consider any financial liabilities arising from the deferral of the levy for 2027/28.

It was explained that freezing the levy was not a viable option and, as a result, a levy had to be charged in 2027/28 as otherwise the CJC would be unable to set a legitimate budget for 2027/28. The other three options available to members were acknowledged, and it was emphasised that options 3 and 4 were the realistic options.

A report was provided on the current posts within the CJC, and the anticipated additional posts that would be needed over the next three years. Further detail was given on how the CJC's staffing costs had evolved over the past four financial years.

It was reported that the Medium Term Financial Plan noted the options for dealing with the CJC's reserves. It was clarified that the reserves did not include those of the Growth Deal, the Investment Zone, or the Regional Skills Partnership, and that these had all been

earmarked for specific purposes and funded through separate grants or contractual agreements. It was confirmed that the reserves referred to in the report were those that remained for the CJC, they referred to the CJC's functions, and were supported by the levy. These functions related to the corporate core of the CJC, and included the functions required to run a local authority body, the regional transport function and the strategic planning function.

It was explained that the Medium Term Financial Plan had been developed by taking into account these specific functions and the expected expenditure over the next three financial years. An explanation was provided on how these functions could be funded.

It was reported that the total reserves were approximately £1.6 million as at 31 March 2026, but it was explained that the CJC had already approved the use of around £625,000 of these funds as part of the budget setting process for 2026/27. It was further noted that as part of the July 2026 financial review, it was expected that a further £40,000 of these funds would be used during the current financial year to cope with the expected overspend. It was confirmed that the total reserves of the CJC at the end of the current financial year, excluding those relating to the Growth Deal, the Regional Skills Partnership, and the Investment Zone, were expected to be £971,543.

It was stressed that there was no specific formula for determining the level of general reserves, but as a general rule, 5% of total revenue expenditure was a wise level to be retained as reserves. It was recommended that around £132,000 be held in reserves as general balances, leaving a total of £839,851 available at the start of 2027/28 to be used in setting the budget.

In response to a question as to which option the Section 151 Officer would recommend, it was clarified that options 1 or 2 were not realistic, and that options 3 or 4 were preferable. However, it was noted that option 3 would be the most preferred option, as it would enable the CJC to retain more reserves and would be less likely to affect the levy in the years to come.

It was noted that some members would not support option 3 and would prefer to support option 4, due to the current financial pressures on local authorities. It was asked whether it would be possible for officials to provide an alternative option between option 3 and option 4, and it was proposed that an alternative option be provided, using 80% of the estimated usable reserves available as at 31 March 2027 as a basis. It was noted that this would leave 20% in reserves, in addition to the 5% earmarked in reserves. It was confirmed that this option would be presented at the next meeting of the CJC.

It was also asked whether it would be possible for officers to provide an analysis of the cost of this option to each individual local authority, and whether the impact of a reduction in resources could be considered in order to further reduce the levy. It was noted that the CJC was a growing organisation with an increasing demand for resources, and that it was therefore unlikely that it would be possible to reduce resources.

Clarification was sought regarding the legal requirement for local authorities to support the Corporate Joint Committees. It was confirmed that local councils had a legal obligation to engage with Corporate Joint Committees, and that the Senedd expected local authorities to provide financial support to the Corporate Joint Committees in Wales. It was further explained that the extent of financial support provided by local authorities varied from region to region in Wales, it depended on the financial position of the local authorities, and that the decision was one to be made by the individual councils. Members were informed that if they believed this model to be unfair, that they should submit their observations directly to the Welsh Government.

A question was asked as to whether the recruitment process could be delayed to allow for greater financial flexibility. It was noted that the report showed that the CJC had already considered how best to secure resources and staffing levels over the next three financial years, in order to fulfil its own statutory responsibilities. It was further explained that the CJC was responsible for a significant amount of public money, and that it would not be possible to delay the recruitment of essential staff.

Members were thanked for their discussion, noting that they were not easy options given that all local authorities were operating under difficult circumstances. It was stressed that the CJC did not have a sustainable financing model, and that it relied on fixed-term contracts and temporary or advisory resources, and the Medium Term Financial Strategy was a reflection of this.

The officers were thanked for their work.

10. ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE DECISION MAKING FOR IN-YEAR MANAGEMENT OF THE REGIONAL TRANSPORT FUND

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

RESOLVED:

To approve that authority be delegated to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chair of the Strategic Transport Sub-Committee, the Monitoring Officer, the Chief Finance Officer and relevant local authority transport leads, to approve and submit regional change requests to Welsh Government in respect of the in-year management of the Regional Transport Fund programme.

It was noted that the Welsh Government would continue to make the final grant decisions in relation to the Regional Transport Fund.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented, and it was highlighted that the Regional Transport Fund was one of the main sources of funding for schemes submitted through the Regional Transport Plan. Members were reminded that the Programme had been approved by the CJC at its meeting in November last year, which had previously been submitted to the Welsh Government. It was reported that the CJC was now responsible for managing the delivery of the schemes and budget expenditure.

It was explained that changes in underspend and changes to the Programme would occur as the schemes progressed, and that the report sought delegated authority to enable more flexible responses to these changes. It was confirmed that this proposal had been submitted to the Strategic Transport Sub-Committee during its July meeting, where it was recommended that it be approved to the CJC, although it was noted that any final decisions regarding changes to the programme sat with the Welsh Government.

11. ANNUAL REPORT 2025/26

The report was presented by Alwen Williams, Chief Executive.

RESOLVED:

As the meeting was no longer quorate, it was resolved to postpone the decision.

12. TRANSFORMATION AND IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME UPDATE

The report was presented by Alwen Williams, Chief Executive and Senior Responsible Owner of the Programme and Dave Hole, Programme Leader.

RESOLVED:

It was resolved to postpone the decision as the meeting was no longer quorate.

13. NORTH WALES CORPORATE JOINT COMMITTEE PETITION SCHEME

The report was presented by Helen Edwards, Deputy Monitoring Officer.

RESOLVED:

It was resolved to postpone the decision as the meeting was no longer quorate.

14. ESTABLISHMENT OF A STANDARDS SUB-COMMITTEE

The report was presented by Helen Edwards, Deputy Monitoring Officer.

RESOLVED:

It was resolved to postpone the decision as the meeting was no longer quorate.

15. CJC SUB-COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP CHANGES AND LAY MEMBER APPOINTMENT

The report was presented by Mark Watkins, CJC Head of Legal Services/Monitoring Officer.

RESOLVED:

It was resolved to postpone the decision as the meeting was no longer quorate.

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

_____

(Chair)