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Mid Wales Corporate  
Joint Committee

**Reference:** AC381

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### Via email

Dear Colleagues

## Commentary on CJsCs' progress – Mid Wales Corporate Joint Committee

Further to my recent summary report on the Corporate Joint Committees' (CJC) progress in developing their arrangements, this letter sets out the findings pertinent to the Mid Wales Corporate Joint Committee. It is structured around the following areas as per the summary report:

- understanding of the Welsh Government's aims for the CJsCs.
- evolving governance arrangements..
- CJC's plans to deliver the Welsh Government aims and meet their statutory obligations.
- How the CJC relates to existing partnership arrangements.
- CJC's plans to meet their requirements under the WFG Act, including setting their well-being objectives.

My team will be happy to attend a meeting of the CJC to talk through the findings.

### Understanding of Welsh Government's aims for the CJsCs

- Mid Wales CJC generally understands the Welsh Government's aims for the CJsCs.
- However, when I did my initial work in autumn 2022, there were mixed views about the value of the CJC and its role to drive regional working. The CJC was accepting, rather than embracing, of these aims.
- Nevertheless, the CJC recognises that it is a legal requirement with specific functions and powers, and it is beginning to work towards its implementation.

- I understand it has recently had a workshop to discuss its future operations and I will be keen to see how the CJC progresses following this workshop.
- As I mention in my summary report, I recognise that there was a strong sense of frustration about the preparedness of Welsh Government to support the implementation of the CJsCs. This included the phased approach to legislation and guidance, but notably the financial status issues around VAT and borrowing, and the pace at which these issues were resolved. I appreciate that these issues have affected the pace at which the CJC has progressed.

### **Governance arrangements**

- **The CJC has established and constituted its core governance arrangements, but aside from the Strategic Development Planning sub-committee, other sub-committees are not yet up and running and the CJC has not met since January 2023.**
- The CJC agreed its standing orders in January 2022 and its constitution in July 2022. This included its scheme of delegation, procedure rules and code of conduct.
- The CJC has met twice since July 2022, but has not met since it agreed its 2023-24 budget in January 2023 underlining the limited activity to date. The CJC cancelled its meeting in May 2023 pending a meeting with Welsh Government Ministers. It is due to meet at the end of July 2023.
- The CJC has appointed to its statutory posts making the most of the flexibility to use existing arrangements from the two councils. It has agreed that the Chief Executive post will be rotated annually between the Chief Executives of the two councils. The post has recently rotated on an interim basis to the Chief Executive of Ceredigion County Council.
- The Section 151 and Monitoring Officer roles are held by the relevant officers from Ceredigion County Council and Powys County Council respectively.
- As well as the statutory officers, the CJC has appointed joint Senior Responsible Officers. One from Powys County Council and one from Ceredigion County Council. The CJC has also appointed a Strategic Programme Manager, and Programme Support officer to support the work of the CJC. These posts are seconded from Powys County Council. The Strategic Programme Manager post also covers wider regional work (the Mid Wales Growth deal, Regional Skills Partnership) for 50% of their time.
- The statutory guidance on the CJC sets out the expectation that the CJC will set up specific sub-committees for its key functions. The CJC has done this. It has agreed the terms of reference and membership of its Strategic Development Planning and Regional Transport Planning sub-committees. The CJC has indicated its intention to appoint the Growing Mid Wales Board as its Regional Economic Well-being Development sub-committee.
- The CJC has also agreed the terms of reference and membership of its other sub-committees. This includes its Standards Sub-Committee, Overview and

Scrutiny Sub-Committee, and its Governance and Audit Sub-Committee (GAC). It has appointed lay members to its GAC as required. Two representatives from the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority will also be appointed to the GAC.

- As its activities have been limited to date, some of its governance arrangements are not yet active. I recognise that the CJC had not wanted to progress its arrangements until the financial status issues had been resolved. As of June 2023, only one of the sub-committees, the Strategic Development sub-committee, has met. The Mid Wales Growth Board has been meeting, but it has not updated its terms of reference to reflect that it is also now a sub-committee of the CJC.
- The CJC is required to co-operate with, and provide assistance to, the scrutiny undertaken by constituent bodies or via a joint scrutiny committee. The CJC has agreed the terms of reference and membership for an Overview and Scrutiny sub-committee with representatives from both councils. This sub-committee hasn't met yet. It will be important for the CJC to be held to account for its activities. The CJC may find it helpful to look at my [discussion paper on scrutiny](#) as it develops its scrutiny arrangements.
- The Mid Wales Growth Board (MWGB) has not formally decided if it will transfer to the CJC. However, I understand that following the recent meeting with Ministers, this is the likely direction of travel. This would seem sensible given the two arrangements largely involve the same bodies and are working to the same objectives.
- If the MWGB and CJC decide to transfer the Mid Wales Growth Deal to the CJC, this would mean that the CJC would have a much larger budget and increased responsibility. The role of the GAC and other governance arrangements will have greater significance. I would, therefore, expect that it constitutes its Governance and Audit Committee at the earliest opportunity so that there is the necessary scrutiny and oversight of its finances and arrangements.
- I would expect that the CJC now advances the implementation of its governance arrangements. I will be monitoring their progress over the next 12 months. I would expect to see that they are operating in practice to help provide the necessary checks and balances in line with the principles of good governance.

## Progress and clarity of plans

- **The CJC is beginning to develop its broader vision and priorities and has made some progress determining its options for its strategic development and transport planning functions.**
- The CJC has drafted a corporate plan which sets out its five-year vision for mid-Wales. The CJC's priorities are focused on its core functions and duty: economy, strategic planning, and transport.

- Welsh Government officers shared advisory notices recommending early preparation for the strategic development plans in August 2021.
- Recognising the particular local issue around the local development plan for Powys, it is positive that the CJC has made progress to consider its options for developing its Strategic Development Plan and has been proactively engaging with WG on this.
- The report that went to Strategic Development Planning sub-committee in December provided a comprehensive overview of the local context and issues together with comprehensive information around a range of options for developing the SDP.
- The CJC has agreed to put in place a dedicated team to support the delivery of its strategic development planning function. It has agreed that Ceredigion Council will take the lead on this function and an officer working group has been set up to work through the next steps.
- The CJC was also beginning to explore its options for developing its Regional Transport Plan. It was due to consider these options in November, but this meeting was cancelled. My team is not aware that the CJC has considered this item again more recently.
- I am aware that there is an existing regional transport arrangement which also involves Gwynedd County Council: the TraCC Partnership (Mid Wales Transportation). But that the CJC has not yet determined how TRaCC will interact with the CJC or what this will mean for the delivery of the CJC's regional transport planning function. The CJC's Regional Transport Planning sub-committee has not met. Therefore, the CJC's progress around this function is more limited than its strategic development function.
- I appreciate that there were some delays in resolving the financial status issues and that Welsh Government had not finalised the RTP guidance. However, Welsh Government has engaged with the CJs about the strategic development and transport planning functions so the CJC should have some understanding of expectations. There was also an event in January 2022 to discuss expectations.
- Despite the financial status issues, I would have liked to have seen more progress with the CJC's regional transport function. I would expect to see further progress from this point forward.
- The CJC has not decided whether it will merge the Mid Wales Growth Deal into the CJC although its draft corporate plan includes the Mid Wales Growth Deal long term vision to drive its economic priority. There is, therefore, some clear correlation between the two arrangements. The CJC will need to determine how these arrangements will work together. This will include working through any staffing and financial implications.
- I understand the CJC has recently had a workshop to discuss and agree its priorities and its future operation. On the back of that workshop, I would expect to see the CJC moving forward swiftly with its plans and be keen to understand its progress.

- The CJC has acknowledged in its draft corporate plan that it must meet a range of public sector duties. This includes Welsh language and equalities duties.
- Within its draft corporate plan, the CJC has set out its equalities vision and supporting objectives. The CJC has adopted the Integrated Impact Assessment used by Powys County Council to help it demonstrate its adherence to its equalities duties.
- It has not published its Child Poverty action plan or biodiversity report as required as part of its public sector duties.
- The CJC has reflected that it is in the early stages of its formation so still needs to determine how it will meet these duties. I would expect to see the CJC addressing its public sector duties at the earliest opportunity albeit I appreciate this will be in a manner proportionate to its role.

### Partnerships

- **The CJC is very much in its early stages and has set out the need to consider how it can work with other partnerships but hasn't explored how it can make the most of the involvement of the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority, beyond its role in strategic development planning.**
- I have commented frequently on the complex partnership landscape in Wales so am keen to see how CJs are exploring how they relate to and work with existing partnerships. To make the most of existing resources and to tackle challenges more collaboratively.
- The CJC sees that its inception builds on a range of existing partnership arrangements in the region and beyond. And, in its corporate plan, it has emphasised that it needs to determine how it can work with these existing partnerships.
- During our interviews with CJC's officers, there was mention of engaging Gwynedd Council in its approach to regional transport given its membership in TRaCC. However, there has been no further progress on this.
- It will be key for the CJC to explore how it can engage and work with other bodies to make the most of resources and expertise within the region. I would like to see more progress on this when I do my next piece of work on CJs.
- The CJC can co-opt other members onto its arrangements. It has agreed the membership of its sub-committees.
- Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority (BBNPA) is a statutory member of the CJC. It is represented on the Strategic Planning sub-committee and will be represented on the CJC's Governance and Audit Sub-committee. But beyond this, the CJC has not taken the opportunity to involve the BBNPA in its other roles and functions. Yet the BBNPA also has requirements around economic development and has a significant reach geographically. The BBNPA has the potential to help the CJC deliver its objectives and functions.

The CJC would benefit from exploring how it can work with the BBNPA to facilitate this.

### **Well-being of Future Generations Act**

- **The CJC has not published its well-being objectives. It was required to do so by 1 April 2023. I would expect to see it progressing with these in line with legislative requirements.**
- Like the other named bodies under the WFG Act, the CJC must set and publish well-being objectives. It must act in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting those objectives and when taking steps to meet them.
- The CJC has set out its draft well-being objectives and well-being statement in its draft corporate plan. The CJC has not approved this plan yet.
- I have not done a detailed review of the extent to which the CJC has applied the sustainable development principle to the setting of its well-being objectives.
- Based on my high-level review of the draft well-being statement, I can see that its well-being objectives align with its core functions and that its statement covers some of the core elements set out in the legislation. This includes how it will contribute to meeting the national well-being goals and its arrangements for measuring progress with its plan.
- The CJC hasn't consulted upon its well-being objectives and plans to do this over the summer. I recognise that consultations on draft plans and policies do not always yield good response rates. Like other bodies, the CJC will need to explore alternative ways of involving the community, such as engaging communities earlier in discussions or drawing on existing information.
- It is positive that the CJC has already identified the need to involve the Public Services Board. It will need to determine the impact of the CJC's well-being objectives on those of other public bodies.
- More broadly, the CJC has a duty to act in accordance with the sustainable development principle. That framework has the potential to add value to how it plans and deliver its work. I will expect to see the CJC apply this principle in a meaningful way, across its functions. I will be undertaking examinations of the extent to which it has applied the sustainable development principle in future years, as required by the Act.
- My team has developed some positive indicators which provide an illustrative set of characteristics of what good looks like when organisations act in accordance with the sustainable development principle. The constituent bodies will be familiar with these, and it will be useful for the CJC to draw on these as it delivers its well-being objectives.

The CJC should consider this letter in tandem with my summary report, which provides an assessment of the collective position of the four CJCs.

I intend to do further work over the next 18-24 months to assess the CJCs' progress.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adrian Crompton', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

**ADRIAN CROMPTON**  
**Auditor General for Wales**