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South West Wales Corporate
Joint Committee

Via email

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Dear Colleagues

Commentary on CJsCs' progress – South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee

Further to my recent summary report on the Corporate Joint Committees' progress in developing their arrangements, this letter sets out the findings pertinent to the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee. The letter 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 Well-Being of Future Generations Act (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

- South West Wales CJC had a clear understanding of Welsh Government's aims for the CJs, although it was apparent that it wasn't entirely supportive of the need for the CJs. I appreciate this was, in part, linked to the CJC's concerns about lack of resources to support the implementation of the CJC and its functions. It proactively raised these concerns with Welsh Government.
- Nevertheless, the CJC was generally positive about the opportunities the CJs could bring for the region including beyond its core functions. Most notably, by adopting the South West Wales regional energy strategy and the regional economic delivery plan.

Governance arrangements

- **Overall, we are assured that the CJC has established its core governance arrangements and that most of its arrangements are up and running.**
- This includes its main Corporate Joint Committee, its overview and scrutiny sub-committee and its Governance and Audit Committee (GAC). The CJC has agreed the terms of reference for four thematic based sub-committees (regional transport, regional economic development, strategic development planning, and regional energy strategy). But, as of May 2023, these sub-committees had not yet met so had not begun to deliver their roles in line with their terms of reference. Dates for these meetings were agreed at the annual general meeting in June.
- The Overview and Scrutiny sub-committee has agreed its high-level work programme. We appreciate the members are primarily getting up to speed with the CJC at the moment. As the work of the CJC develops, the sub-committee needs to consider the value and impact its activity will have, beyond just noting progress with plans, to provide a mechanism to hold the CJC to account. Our [paper on scrutiny](#) may be helpful to the sub-committee.
- The CJC has taken a proportionate and pragmatic approach to its governance arrangements. It has maximised the flexibility to tailor its arrangements, for example, making use of some of its constituent bodies' arrangements and seconded statutory officers from within the constituent councils on a part-time basis.
- It is positive that the CJC has taken the opportunity to involve the National Park Authorities (NPAs) more fully in its arrangements, beyond the NPAs' statutory role around strategic development planning. As well as ensuring it considers the impact its actions have on the national park authority areas, this will also help the CJC to maximise the positive contribution that NPAs could have on the delivery of the CJs' well-being objectives and functions.
- We will be keen to see how the CJC's governance arrangements support the CJC as it continues to develop.

Progress and clarity of plans

- **We found that the CJC had set out a clear vision in its corporate plan 2023-28, which drew on its Regional Economic Development plan, regional energy strategy and national policies.**
- The CJC is progressing with its plans to meet its economic well-being duty, building on the work of the Swansea Bay City Deal. At the moment, the CJC does not intend to bring the two regional arrangements together, given the different funding streams and legal bases. Managing and overseeing two regional arrangements, which have similar and mutually beneficial objectives, will require resources. The CJC and the constituent bodies of the Swansea Bay City Deal will need to determine how it can do this efficiently and effectively. Officers are currently exploring options to minimise the administrative burden and associated costs of operating the two arrangements.
- **However, progress with delivering its strategic development planning and regional transport planning functions was more limited.** We understand the CJC feels this is largely due to concerns about availability of resources and that the Welsh Government had not yet issued final guidance. I have raised a number of points about Welsh Government preparedness in my summary report and recognise that the financial status issues in particular have impacted on the CJC's ability to progress, not wanting to incur VAT for example.
- Welsh Government has engaged with the CJCs about the strategic development and transport planning functions so the CJCs should have some understanding of expectations. For example, it shared advisory notices recommending early preparation for the strategic development plans in August 2021. There was also an event to discuss CJCs' planning functions in January 2022. So, despite the financial status issues, I consider more progress could have been made in these areas. I would expect to see greater and swifter progress from this point forward.
- Whilst the CJC has agreed a budget to support its regional transport function it also only set a very small budget for strategic development planning for 2023-24. This underlines that it's unlikely there will be much activity on this. Welsh Government have been clear to regions that they are willing to provide support to develop the plans, both directly and via Transport for Wales.
- The SDP process, in particular, is complex and lengthy and the CJC needs to get this underway. There is a risk the CJC will not be able to achieve its objectives and improvements for the region if realistic budgets are not allocated to support the delivery of its functions. It needs to determine how it can maximise its abilities as a separate legal entity to help it do this.
- The CJC has made progress working to address its public sector duties, such as its biodiversity and equalities duties, and Welsh Language requirements. Whilst the CJC recognises the requirement to produce a Child Poverty

strategy in its Corporate Plan, as of May 2023 it had not developed its child poverty action plan as required. It will need to do so as soon as possible.

Partnerships

- I have commented frequently on the complex partnership landscape in Wales so am keen to see how CJsCs 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 has been clear that it has wanted to build on the existing relationships in the region. It is positive to see that it has looked beyond the statutory membership of the CJC co-opting representatives from Swansea University and the University of South Wales, Hywel Dda and Swansea Bay university health boards. It is also building on the expertise of the Swansea Bay city deal. This should provide it with a significant opportunity to boost the collaborative power of the region and generate wider ownership to deliver its priorities. I will be keen to see the impact of this as the CJC progresses.

Well-Being of Future Generations Act (WFG Act)

- 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 published its well-being objectives by 1 April 2023 as required. It incorporated these within its corporate plan as recommended within the statutory guidance.
- We 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. The CJC told us it is taking a proportionate approach to meeting its duties under the Act.
- We can see that the CJC has set out in its corporate plan how it intends to embed the five ways of working. From our high-level review of the document, we can see that the corporate plan covers elements set out in the Well-Being of Future Generations Act legislation. For example, the CJC has set out how its well-being objectives will help contribute to the delivery of the national well-being goals.
- The corporate plan was subject to public consultation, including a targeted approach with key stakeholders in the region. The CJC developed an easy read version of the plan and a summary of the plan on one page to make it easier to access and understand. The CJC has identified some ways that it could strengthen its application of the sustainable development principle. For instance, by developing a participation strategy and building on approaches

being used by its constituent bodies to help it involve the full diversity of the population. It also talks about the need to work in an integrated way.

- The CJC has adopted Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council's impact assessment tool to help it demonstrate its consideration of the well-being goals and the five ways of working. I appreciate these tools can be helpful. But it needs to be more than simply having an impact assessment at the end of a report. My recent report on equalities impact assessment underlined the point about consideration of these areas earlier to help inform decisions and policies.
- The CJC has a duty to act in accordance with the sustainable development principle. More broadly, that framework has the potential to add value to how it plans and delivers its work. For example, the wider benefits of applying the sustainable development principle to meeting its transport, planning and economic development functions and powers. The CJC may find it helpful to draw on the range of resources on transport and planning available on the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales website.
- 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.
- We have 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. The CJC may find it helpful to draw on these positive indicators 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.

Thank you for your support and contributions to this review.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Alun', written in a cursive style.

Adrian Crompton
AUDITOR GENERAL FOR WALES