

South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee

(Via Microsoft Teams)

Members Present:

23 January 2024

Chairperson: Councillor R.Stewart

Vice Chairperson: Councillor D.Price

Councillors: D.Simpson and S.K.Hunt

**National Park
Representatives:** A.Edwards and D.Clements

Co-Opted Members: E.Woollett and S.Toombs

**Officers In
Attendance:** M.Nicholls, W.Walters, W.Bramble, G.Jones,
T.Jones, C.Moore, S.Aldred-Jones,
L.McAndrew, N.Pearce, M.Shaw, K.Tillman and
C.Plowman

Scrutiny Invitees: Councillors T.Bowen and R.Sparks

1. **Welcome and Chairs Announcements**

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. **Declarations of Interests**

There were no Declarations of Interests received.

3. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Officers were made aware of an error in regards to the attendance section of the minutes. It was highlighted that D.Clements was the representative for Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, and not an Officer.

The minutes from the previous meetings held on 24 October 2023 and 5 December 2023 were approved as an accurate record, subject

to the amendment of D.Clements being the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Representative and not Officer.

4. **Forward Work Programme**

Members noted the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee Forward Work Programme.

5. **Western Gateway Representation**

Members were provided with a report seeking approval of an appropriate approach to take regarding the offer tabled for an additional seat to be added, for the South West Corporate Joint Committee, on the Western Gateway Board.

It was explained that the Western Gateway was a cross-regional partnership of local government, business and academia leaders across South Wales and Western England; with the purpose of driving the economy forward, creating opportunities for sustainable growth using skills and industry to power a greener, fairer future for our area and the UK.

The Committee was informed that in 2019, three of the four South West Wales authorities, Neath Port Talbot Council, Carmarthenshire Council and Pembrokeshire Council, concluded that they would not be included in the Western Gateway. It was confirmed that Swansea Council did decide to join the board.

It was noted that with the development of the energy and economic agenda across South West Wales, the formation of the Corporate Joint Committee, and securing the Celtic Freeport Bid, discussions had since taken place, amongst the other three Leaders of the Corporate Joint Committee, in regards to joining the partnership. Officers stated that each of the three Local Authorities wrote to western gateway; who had responded and concluded that they would welcome wider involvement from the Swansea Bay City Deal area to formally become part of the partnership.

Officers highlighted that the discussion surrounding the South West Corporate Joint Committee's joining of the Western Gateway Board had been based on replicating the Cardiff Capital Region arrangements; this would mean that Swansea Council would maintain their seat on the board, and there would be a space on rotation for the remaining Local Authorities in the Region.

It was explained that there were three options for consideration, which were detailed within the circulated report. It was stated that the recommended option was 'Option 1: Agree the additional seat as a Corporate Joint Committee seat on the board in addition to Swansea's seat'. It was added that this option would be best implemented on an annual rotation basis of the three Local Authorities, starting with Carmarthenshire Council; the suggested rotation was also contained within the circulated report.

Following discussions, the Leaders were all in agreement of implementing Option 1 contained within the circulated report.

RESOLVED:

That representation of the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee, on the Western Gateway Board, be agreed as follows:

Representation be provided by one of the Leaders of the three local authorities on an annual rotation basis as stated below, in addition to Swansea's seat.

- Leader, Carmarthenshire County Council
- Leader, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
- Leader, Pembrokeshire County Council

6. **Quarter 3 Financial Monitoring 2023/24**

The Committee was provided with the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee quarter three financial monitoring report, for year ended 2023/24.

Officers were pleased to announce confirmation from Welsh Government regarding the transport grant, to support the development of the Regional Transport Plan; Welsh Government had confirmed £125k for the current financial year, and a further commitment of £100k for the next financial year.

The detail of the financial monitoring was included in Appendix A of the circulated report. The Chief Finance Officer mentioned that the net expenditure was below the original forecast outturn of £398,553; which means that there will be a contribution of monies back into the reserve at the end of the year.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

7. **South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee Budget 2024/25**

The circulated report sought Members to agree and set the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee budget for the financial year 2024/25.

Prior to the introduction to the report, it was stated that the Chair of the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee had received a letter from the Chair of the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee – Overview and Scrutiny Sub Committee; the letter contained the Overview and Scrutiny Sub Committee's response to the draft budget for 2024/25, which they considered during their meeting held on 16 January 2024.

The Chair of the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee – Overview and Scrutiny Sub Committee was present at the meeting to provide representation, and raise the key points expressed throughout the letter.

In response, the Chair of the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee provided assurances that the Committee would continue to lobby Welsh Government for the appropriate resources in order to undertake the work required of them.

Officers explained that the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee was responsible for setting its budget and agreeing the levy charge to constituent authorities; this had to be set and agreed prior to 31 January 2024. It was added that the levy allocation was based on population size.

Similar to previous years, it was concluded that the National Park Authorities would not be subject to a levy charge for the financial year 2024/25.

Members were informed of the three budget options for consideration. The Chief Finance Officer provided an overview of the options, which were detailed in the circulated report.

- Option 1 - Continuity budget in 2024/25
- Option 2 - Continuity budget minus 10% in 2024/25
- Option 3 - Optimal Full Cost Operational Budget in 2024/25

Reference was made to option three, which had an estimated expenditure of £2,082,899. It was expressed that this option would be very challenging given the position of the public sector funding and difficulty Local Authorities were facing in terms of budget setting.

It was explained that option one and option two were the same in terms of delivery; the only difference was that option two detailed a 10% reduction on the levy from constituent Local Authorities, given the budgetary pressures they were faced with. However, it was noted that the 10% could currently be funded from the reserves, meaning that the expenditure could still be delivered without cutting services; the utilisation of 10% from the reserves would still provide a healthy level of reserves, which would allow the Corporate Joint Committee to be developed over the forthcoming period.

Discussion took place in regards to the position of the four Sub Committees and delivering their work streams; the circulated report detailed what could be delivered in regards to each budget option. It was mentioned that there will be a significant amount of work that will develop going forward.

It was noted that the recommended option was 'continuity budget minus 10% in 2024/25'; which was detailed as option two in the circulated report. It was clarified that the second option was costed at £615,049 with a reserve offset of 10% (minus £59,071) giving a net position of £555,978; this net position will be split between the four Local Authorities on a population basis, and will be the levy in which they will individually have to incorporate into their own budget setting process.

RESOLVED:

- That the budget for the Corporate Joint Committee be set at £615,049 (Continuity with 10% levy reduction), as detailed in Appendix B of the circulated report, be approved.
- That the Levy Charge, based on population to the constituent authorities, be approved as follows:

Local Authority Levy 2024/25

- City and County of Swansea Council (Levy) - £191,188
- Carmarthenshire County Council (Levy) – £151,281
- Neath Port Talbot CBC (Levy) - £114,094
- Pembrokeshire County Council (Levy) - £99,414

Total = £555,978

8. Urgent Items

There were no urgent items received.

CHAIRPERSON