

South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee

(Via Microsoft Teams)

Members Present:

7 December 2022

Chairperson: Councillor R.Stewart

Councillors: D.Price, D.Simpson and S.K.Hunt

**National Park
Representatives:** T.Jones

**Officers In
Attendance:** M.Nicholls, W.Walters, G.Jones, K.Jones,
C.Griffiths, C.Moore, G.Jones, O.Enoch,
T.Evans, S.Jones, R.Heath-Davies, A.Parnell
and C.Plowman

1. **Welcome and Chairs Announcements**

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. **Declarations of Interests**

The following Officer declared an interest at the start of the meeting:

O.Enoch: Agenda Item 6 – Consider
Options in respect of the
2023/2024 budget as he is
employed by the South West
Wales Corporate Joint
Committee

3. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 11 October 2022, was approved as an accurate record.

4. **Forward Work Programme**

It was noted that the date of the March 2023 meeting had changed to a later rescheduled date of 30 March 2023, and that this would be reflected in the Forward Work Programme.

The Forward Work Programme was noted.

5. **Approval of Statement of Accounts 2021/22**

The Committee was provided with the Statement of Accounts for the year ended 2021/22.

Officers explained that earlier in the year, the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee agreed to set a zero budget for 2021/22 and raised no levy; this was during the time in which the arrangements for the Corporate Joint Committee were being established. It was noted that the consequence of this, meant that there weren't any transactions for the year 2021/22; however, it was a requirement to produce a Statement of Accounts and confirmation of the financial position during the year.

Members were informed that, once the Statement of Accounts were approved, Audit Wales would be able to conclude the year 2021/22.

RESOLVED:

That the Joint Committee receive and approve the Statement of Accounts for 2021/22.

6. **Consider Options in respect of the 2023/2024 Budget**

O.Enoch reaffirmed his interest as left the meeting for this item only.

The circulated report set out a number of budget options for consideration, for the year 2023/24, for the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee; Members would need to consider how the Committee would be developing the substantial workloads within the various work streams going forward.

Officers referred to the initial presentation of the budget, which was included in Appendix A of the circulated report; this provided a full budget evaluation for the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee, if it were to start developing and undertaking work in relation to the four main work streams. It was noted that it entailed employing staff and commissioning certain pieces of work; this

evaluation formulated a potential cost of £1.5million, which was considerably more than the current years spend.

Following on from the above, it was stated that the potential cost of £1.5million raised concerns when in discussions with constituent Local Authorities, as this would put extra pressures on their budgets; due to these concerns, Officers carried out a piece of work which formulated different options in regards to setting the budget for the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee for 2023/24. Details of the options were highlighted as follows:

- Option 1 – To agree to prioritise the work of the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee and levy accordingly.
- Option 2 – To do minimum in 2023/24 and downsize the budget, with limited work being carried out in each of the work streams; however, still progressing the lower level work such as the Regional Transport Plan (RTP), as there would be an element of budget supporting the Plan going forward. It was mentioned that Welsh Government support of additional funds would be essential in developing certain activities. The circulated report identified that this option set out a budget of around £617k, which was marginally above this year's budget.
- Option 3 – Suspend all activities of the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee. It was noted that in order to do this, Welsh Government would have to amend legislation; however, it was something that could be considered for future years (2024/25 onwards), as the budget pressures were likely to continue going forward.

Members were informed that they were required to set a draft budget, before then considering their final decision and formal approval in January 2023; once the draft budget was approved Officers would notify constituent Local Authorities of the indicative budget.

A discussion took place in regards to the proposals for activities in regards to Option 2, which was detailed in Appendix C of the circulated report. The following was highlighted for each of the four work streams:

- In March 2022, it was noted that the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee approved the South West Wales Regional Energy Strategy; Wales Energy Services were going

to be funding this work. Officers were content that although there would be minimal budget provision for this work stream, the work can progress accordingly with the funding from Wales Energy Services.

- A lot of the work in regards to the Economic Development Strategy was stated to be linked to the Energy Strategy; Officers were comfortable to reduce the budget requirement on this work stream.
- In regards to the Regional Transport Plan (RTP), it was noted that there was still lack of clarity as to what support was going to be received from Welsh Government in terms of resourcing the Regional Transport Plan; Officers understood that this work stream was a priority for Leaders. The proposal for this work stream, within Appendix C of the circulated report, would be to employ someone to start to co-ordinating the work as there were sufficient monies to be able to do so. It was mentioned that the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee had an underspend projected in this year's budget, which could be put into a reserve, and used for this work should the Committee need to do more; between now and the January meeting, Officers would press Welsh Government for more certainty and clarity on what resource they were going to put into the Regional Transport Plan activity.
- In terms of the Strategic Development Plan (SDP), it was stated that there was still consultation around the timescales and the approach of this work; Officers suggested formally writing to Welsh Government to ask for the SDP timescales to be extended, as there were a number of Local Authorities that needed to progress their Local Development Plans.

Further clarity was provided to the Committee in regards to Option 3, as detailed above. It was explained that the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 created the establishment of the Corporate Joint Committees; the legislation stated that Local Authorities had to have a Corporate Joint Committee, and were required to undertake certain functions. Members were informed that the only way to be able to step away from this requirement was if Welsh Government chose to change the legislation and remove the obligation to have Corporate Joint Committees; it was open for representation to be made to Welsh Government around this matter, in order for them to understand the concerns that Local Authorities

had. However, it was confirmed that currently, by law, Local Authorities had to participate in Corporate Joint Committees and have a defined programme of activities.

The Committee discussed the costs and plans around the Energy Strategy in more detail. It was highlighted that the Wales Energy Service had been supporting the development of the Regional Energy Plan, and were now supporting and resourcing the development of the Local Energy Plan; this was funding that would enable this work stream to progress. Members were informed that there was a Regional Energy core group of Officers who had been working with the Welsh Government Energy Service, and partners, over a number of years to produce the strategy; Welsh Government had since then offered additional support for the next two years. It was noted that there will be at least 2-3 Officers in place to help with the roll out of the Local Energy Plan actions, and to assist in the further work of developing the Regional Energy Strategy, which will include supporting individual projects to come forward. In addition to that, it was stated that the region had submitted a bid to UK Government for a launch pad initiative; if successful, could provide a further £7million of grant funding to enable small and medium enterprises to bring forward schemes that will contribute to the Energy Strategy Action Plan. It was concluded that with the support of Welsh Government, the additional resources should be in place within the next 3 months or so.

Members provided their views and concerns in regards to the budget setting, and were unanimously in favour of budget Option 2, which was set out in Appendix C of the circulated report.

RESOLVED:

That the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee:

(a) Consider the budget options as set out in Appendix A-C of the circulated report.

(b) Agree and approve the preferred budget option (Option 2, Appendix C) for 2023/24.

7. Presentation regarding the Strategic Development Plan

Members received a presentation in regards to the Strategic Development Plan (SDP).

The SDP was noted to be a statutory requirement and written into the legislation as the primary planning output of Corporate Joint Committees; it will have the same status for Local Authorities and their decision making, as the Local Development Plans (LDPs) and the Future Wales National Plan has. Officers explained that all planning applications, for Welsh Local Authorities, will need to be considered against its LDP, the Future Wales National Plan and the SDP once it had been produced; future LDPs must align and be consistent with the SDP framework. It was added that the purpose of the SDP was to move the planning agenda onto a regional basis, and tackling those issues that were cross boundary and wider than local significance.

Members were informed that there hadn't been any substantive progress so far on the SDP, this was due to minimal budget that was set for the current of 2022/2; however, cross boundary collaboration on projects was advancing, in order to inform LDPs within the region. It was noted that the work that was currently being undertaken will provide evidence for that SDP; some of the current work projects included defining what was described in Future Wales as the 'national growth area' for South West Wales, and looking into future growth projections.

In addition to the above, it was highlighted that Welsh Government had produced a guidance manual on SDPs, which was currently out for consultation for informal comments; Officers were going to be providing feedback on the manual as a region. It was mentioned that there will be a full consultation on the manual in summer 2023.

The following points were noted to still yet to be agreed in terms of the SDP:

- How to engage with Welsh Government on this matter going forward
- The timescales of the work, having regard to factors such as resources
- The budget of the work
- The staff resource and management of the whole process

A discussion took place in regards to the issues and risks associated with the SDP:

- No budget identified to deliver the SDP – subsequently there will be no work to progress it

- No existing resources within Planning Authorities – conversations had taken place, and there weren't any spare resource to divert from existing work streams in order to deliver the SDP
- Staff recruitment issues – there were currently issues with recruiting and finding experience planners for Local Authorities, this will be similar for when recruiting for the SDP
- Council's risk going over LDP end dates – each Local Authority was working on delivering their replacement LDPs, which could clash with the work of the SDP

Officers highlighted three main points for consideration which were engagement with Welsh Government, timescale for South West Wales SDP and the budget implications, as detailed within the circulated presentation.

It was noted that over the next 12 months, there will need to be ongoing dialogue with Welsh Government around the future timescale, and the potential for future funding to be provided to assist in the delivery of the SDP; there was a lot of work that still needed to be undertaken, and clarity that needed to be obtained, and any decision taken relating to the budget will have an effect on the position of the SDP.

Concerns were raised in regards to resources and the ability to progress this work. Officers expressed that it would be important to continue the line of communication with Welsh Government in relation to this matter; the region had a good working relationship with the relevant Welsh Government Officers, and they were understanding of the position that Local Authorities were in. In addition, it would be vital to continue working cross boundary and collaboratively on the projects mentioned in the presentation.

8. **Draft Corporate Plan 2023-2028**

The Committee considered their Draft Corporate Plan for the years 2023-2028, and discussed the proposal of its publication for a six week public consultation exercise.

It was stated that in addition to the responsibility of producing a Regional Transport Plan (RTP), and a Strategic Development Plan (SDP), the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee was also responsible for a set of public sector requirements; this included the requirement to set Well-Being Objectives and having regard to the

Equality Act 2010. Members were informed that the Corporate Plan would be a document that would evolve as the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee develops.

A discussion took place in relation to the proposed vision statement, detailed in the circulated report; the content of this had been drawn from the Economic Development Plan and the Regional Energy Strategy, with acknowledgement to what the legislation requires around Regional Transport Planning and Strategic Development Planning.

In addition to the above, Members were briefed on the three well-being objectives that were proposed. It was noted that the first objective committed to the Economic Delivery Plan and Regional Energy Strategy, the second objective committed to improving transport outcomes linked to the duties to provide a Regional Transport Plan, and the third objective set outcomes based around the statutory duty to prepare the Strategic Development Plan.

Members were also informed of the proposed Equality Objective which was noted to be a statutory requirement; this objective committed to delivering 'A more equal South West Wales by 2035'. It was highlighted that this could be achieved by contributing towards Welsh Government's long-term equality aim of eliminating inequality caused by poverty, the Equality statement set out in Llwybr Newydd (to make transport services and infrastructure accessible and inclusive), and Welsh Government's long-term equality aims of cohesive communities.

The circulated Draft Corporate Plan contained two appendices. It was explained that appendix one hadn't been filled in due to the need to discuss the budget (which took place earlier on in this meeting), which would determine the detail that would need to be included; appendix two detailed the work that would have been undertaken, had Members agreed to the first option within the budget report. It was noted that, subject to approval of the report, Officers would amend the activities detailed in appendix two, to reflect the decisions that were made in regards to the budget earlier on in the meeting.

Officers explained that there was a requirement for public consultation on the Draft Corporate Plan, and this was proposed to be undertaken between January 2023 and March 2023; this will provide opportunity to obtain wider engagement.

It was confirmed that the Corporate Plan would be brought back to the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee in March 2023, for Members to consider the final version, following the public consultation.

RESOLVED:

(a) That Members receive and note the content of the Draft Corporate Plan (together with associated appendices) and approve its publication for a six-week public consultation exercise in January/February 2023;

(b) That further to (a) above, any consultation responses received will be reported back to Members with a view to informing a final version of the Plan ahead of its formal adoption (scheduled for March 2023);

(c) That delegated authority be provided to the Chief Executive to make any typographical, factual and / or editorial amendments to the Draft Corporate Plan ahead of its publication.

9. **The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 - Section 6 - Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty**

Members were briefed on the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, Section 6 requirements in relation to Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems duty.

Officers explained that this report was a reflection of some of the wider corporate duties that were enforced on Corporate Joint Committees; as well as constituent Councils, the Corporate Joint Committee was bound by the Environment Act (Wales) 2016 requirements. It was noted that at this stage in the process, it was important to capture some of the key principles; this would develop further as the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee evolves. Members were informed that there was a requirement to publish the proposed statement, included in the circulated report, by 31 December 2022; therefore, Officers were seeking Members endorsement of the statement, and if approved, a copy would be sent to Welsh Government for their information.

RESOLVED:

That Members note the content of the appended Section 6 Report and endorse its publication by the 31 of December 2022. It is further recommended that a copy of the Appended Report be sent to the Welsh Government.

10. **National Park Authorities as Co-opted members to the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee**

The circulated report provided detail on the proposal to agree co-option status with National Park Authorities.

It was explained that the role of National Park Authorities was limited within the Corporate Joint Committee to the strategic planning work; Officers had been looking into alternative ways to involve the National Park representatives in the other matters that the Corporate Joint Committee will be dealing with in future.

The proposal contained within the circulated report was seeking to extend a co-opted, non-voting status to the Leaders from the National Park Authorities, in order for them to have a presence at the other various meetings associated with the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee, including the Sub Committees; this will allow them to speak and give views on various matters, however they will still not be able to vote on any matters outside of strategic planning.

Clarification was made in relation to paragraph seven of the circulated report; the National Park Authorities would not need to be given co-opted status on the Regional Transport Planning Sub Committee as they had voting rights at this meeting.

A discussion took place in relation to the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee Overview and Scrutiny Sub Committee that was recently established; it was proposed that co-opted, non-voting status be extended to one representative from each of the National Park Authorities, in order for them to attend these meetings as they progress.

Subject to approval today, the Lead Monitoring Officer for the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee will make contact with the National Park Authorities to agree the representatives and discuss the co-option agreements.

RESOLVED:

Members agree that co-option (non-voting) status be granted to Pembrokeshire National Park Authority and Brecon Beacons National Park Authority, to the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee (for areas other than strategic development planning) as set out in paragraphs 6, 7, and 8 of the circulated report.

11. **Urgent Items**

There were no Urgent Items received.

CHAIRPERSON

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