Archwilio Cymru
Audit Wales

Business planning arrangements

South-East Wales Corporate Joint Committee

September 2025

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Audit snapshot

What we looked at

1 We looked at whether the South-East Wales Corporate Joint Committee (CJC) has arrangements that support its annual business planning process. This included arrangements to develop its annual business plan; how it records progress in delivering it; and arrangements to monitor and report on it.

2 We did not look at how the CJC is performing against its annual business plan.

Why this is important

3 There are many reasons why having an annual business plan is important. It can provide direction and focus for the CJC. It can state the priorities and actions it hopes to deliver over the short-term to support achieving its medium to longer term aims.

4 An annual business plan can support transparency by stating what the CJC plans to achieve and how it measures success. Performance indicators and targets can support regular monitoring and evaluation. It can help the CJC hold officers to account.

5 Regular monitoring of an annual business plan throughout the year can inform the CJC of progress. It can also help it make informed decisions if it needs to make changes.

6 An annual business plan can help the CJC decide where to allocate its resources to deliver its priorities. It can also bring officers together to collectively work towards the same priorities.

What we have found

7 As a new public body, the CJC is developing good arrangements to support its annual business planning process. It takes a collaborative approach to developing the annual business plan and uses a range of data to inform it. The CJC is also developing a robust system to record its progress and has set up arrangements to monitor and review it. There are some gaps in its arrangements, which the CJC is committed to addressing.

What we recommend

8 We made three recommendations for the CJC on:

- being clear on its timescales;
- developing guidance to help officers use its Power BI app; and
- setting performance measures.

Our findings

The Corporate Joint Committee is developing good arrangements to produce, monitor and report on its annual business plan

9 The CJC has an annual business plan and is clear on its purpose. The CJC sets key milestones and dates for developing the plan, from the first stage of gathering evidence to the last stage of its publication. Having these milestones and timescales can provide clarity on the organisation's expectation regarding the development of the annual business plan.

10 The CJC has a Performance Framework which outlines its approach to delivering its responsibilities and to help it understand how it is performing. This framework is evolving as the CJC develops and matures. During 2025-26, the CJC intends to implement team plans to support the aims stated in its annual business plan. The CJC produced a template to guide officers in drafting team plans, but the introduction of these plans is dependent on the CJC recruiting into several vacant positions. By providing a template, it can support a consistent approach in the development of team plans which can also support the monitoring and reporting of progress.

11 The CJC has officers responsible for developing its annual business plan and every officer in the CJC has a role in delivering it. The Performance Framework includes 'Individual Performance: Full Potential plans (AFPs)'. Individual plans or AFPs are the link between the CJC's aims and individual employees. This provides a 'golden thread' from individual officers, through to team plans to the annual business plan. The CJC produced a template for individuals and line managers to complete to again ensure there is a consistent approach across the organisation. The Individual Plans should help officers to fully understand their own contributions as well as a means for the CJC to hold officers to account.

12 The CJC has templates to guide officers on how to complete team and individual plans. While the CJC has clear timescales for the individual plans to be completed, it is not clear when team plans are needed. Setting clear expectations for when team plans need completing can strengthen the annual business planning process. It can reduce the risk of these plans not supporting delivery of the priorities stated within the annual business plan.

13 The CJC uses a wealth of data and intelligence to inform its annual business plan. It also commissions research into areas where there is a gap in knowledge and data. Drawing on a range of evidence can provide the CJC with a good understanding of current and future need, risks, and opportunities.

14 Setting the annual business plan is a collaborative process. The CJC held a challenge session with the senior executive team, their individual teams and CJC members to discuss future priorities. This collaborative approach promotes a collective understanding throughout the organisation of the annual priorities and actions.

15 There is good alignment between developing the annual business plan and the resourcing of it. The CJC developed both the annual business plan and the annual budget at the same time to help understand the resource requirements of delivering the annual business plan. The 2025-26 annual business plan includes an overview of the revenue budget and funding sources.

16 We were told during this audit that the CJC had not received any extra funding to deliver its statutory requirements as a new public body. When it drafted the annual business plan and annual budget, it included the need for additional officers in its staff structure to meet its statutory requirements. In particular, the need to develop a Regional Transport Plan and a Strategic Development Plan. To fund these new roles, the CJC approved using £1.3m of reserves. As this approach is not sustainable in the long term, the CJC approved an independent review to understand what resources it needs to be able to deliver its statutory duties alongside its future ambitions.

17 The CJC regularly monitors delivery of its annual business plan. Monthly performance team meetings bring together different teams. These meetings discuss project and investment progress, with progress on delivering the annual business plan milestones being a standard agenda item. There is quarterly reporting to the Governance and Audit Committee (GAC) and the CJC. These arrangements give officers and members regular opportunities to understand and challenge progress in delivering the annual business plan. Regular reporting can also help the CJC make informed decisions if it needs to make changes during the year.

18 The CJC developed a Power BI app which is a valuable tool in capturing, monitoring, and reporting progress in delivering the annual business plan. It is an open tool so officers can access it at any time to update and to check progress. It promotes transparency and an understanding of progress across the organisation. The CJC plans to further enhance the Power BI app functionality and develop guidance to help officers navigate this tool. This guidance should drive a consistent approach to using the tool across the organisation. Guidance can also be particularly helpful in supporting new starters to the organisation as the CJC recruits into its current vacant positions.

19 There is though, a lack of corporate expectation to ensure officers update the Power BI app in a timely manner. Providing clarity could negate the situation when officers attend monthly performance meetings and have not updated the app with progress.

20 The annual business plan 2025-26 contains key milestones. In other words, what needs to happen and by when. It does not include measures, targets, or outcomes. While these might not be relevant for all activities, they can be a useful monitoring tool to help determine progress, pace of delivery and success.

21 When developing its annual business planning arrangements, the CJC is open to learning from others. The CJC looked at English regions, but these consist of combined authorities[1] and are not directly comparable to the status of a CJC in Wales. The CJC is also further forward in its transitioning from a City Deal programme compared to the other three CJCs in Wales. The CJC is aware there is not a tried and tested approach for them to follow.

22 Looking ahead, the CJC is developing a new five year Corporate Plan 2026-2031. It plans to involve officers and members before the CJC considers this for approval in October 2025 along with a new Medium Term Financial Plan. The CJC then intends to develop the 2026-27 annual business plan and the 2026-27 annual budget in time for CJC approval in January 2026. The CJC intends to develop performance measures to support its new five-year Corporate Plan. These in turn, could be included in the annual business plan to show performance aspirations and achievements for that year. Including performance measures can also support the CJC in determining if it is delivering what it intends to, at the pace required to support delivery of the five year Corporate Plan.

[1] Combined authorities | Local Government Association

Recommendations

R1 Clarify timescales

1.1 To ensure team plans contribute to the annual business planning process, the CJC needs to clearly state when these plans need completing every year; and

1.2 The CJC needs to be clear when it expects officers to update the Power BI app. Providing clarity could negate the situation when officers attend monthly performance meetings and have not provided updates.

R2 Develop guidance on using the Power BI app

The CJC needs to develop guidance to help officers use the Power BI app. This guidance should drive a consistent approach to using this across the organisation. Guidance can also support new starters to the organisation as the CJC recruits into its current vacant positions.

R3 Set Performance Measures

Where appropriate, the CJC should set performance measures to help assess progress and pace of delivery of the annual business plan.

Appendices

1 About our work

Scope of the audit

This audit looked at the CJCs arrangements for:

- developing its annual business plan;
- recording delivery of its annual business plan; and
- monitoring and reporting of progress of its annual business plan.

This audit did not look at the CJCs performance.

We completed this audit during June and July 2025.

Audit questions and criteria

Questions

This audit sought to answer the following questions:

- Are there arrangements to support the development of an annual business plan?
- Are there arrangements to support the delivery of its annual business plan?
- Are there arrangements to monitor and review its annual business plan?

Criteria

We assessed whether:

- the CJC has a Performance Management Framework that clearly sets out the purpose of an annual business plan;
- the CJC sets out how it will develop an annual business plan, including
    - what information informs the content of the annual business plan;
    - who is responsible for developing it;
    - the support from the senior executive team; and
    - the resourcing of the annual business plan.
- it is clear who is responsible for delivering the annual business plan;
- the CJC has arrangements to capture and record progress in delivering the annual business plan;
- there are measures to support the monitoring of the annual business plan and who is responsible for monitoring; and
- there is regular reporting of progress.

Methods

We looked at documents and interviewed key people at the CJC.

2 Background information on Corporate Joint Committees

Welsh Government set up four Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs) to help strengthen regional collaboration between local authorities. The four CJCs are North Wales; Mid Wales; South-West Wales; and South-East Wales.

CJCs came into effect in April 2021 through the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

CJCs have statutory duties to develop Regional Transport Plans and Strategic Development Plans. They also have the power to enhance regional economic well-being and have statutory duties.

Between 2021 and 2024, the South-East Wales CJC transitioned from its previous City Deal status into a new public body.

At the time of this audit, the South-East Wales CJC was in its second year as a new public body. It had 76 posts in its staff structure. 19 or 25% of posts were vacant with six officers in interim jobs.

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