



South-East Wales Corporate Joint Committee - Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (CJC JOSC)

Annual Report 2024–2025



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Chair's Foreword

I am pleased to present this Annual report on behalf of the CJC Joint Overview and scrutiny Committee (JOSC) for the 2024-25 municipal year. This has been a year of transition and challenge with the Committee moving from its City Deal origins unto a formal statutory role under the Corporate Joint Committee (CJC) framework. This shift has significantly changed the scale, complexity and responsibility of our work as a regional scrutiny body.

While the Committee has made progress in developing its approach and increasing member engagement, this report offers not only a record of activity, but a frank reflection on what has working, and what has not. Members have consistently called for a reset of scrutiny arrangements to ensure that we can truly provide independent, robust and transparent oversight of major regional decisions.

This year has demonstrated both the value and the limits of scrutiny under current structures. Members have expressed a wish to see stronger recognition of the important role scrutiny plays in the wider governance arrangement of the CJC. The committee has expressed a wish to have more timely access to information in the future, note that the committee has recognised no information up this point in respect of high- profile issues such as the Aberthaw procurement. These issues have prompted a renewed commitment to strengthen scrutiny practice, reshape our role, and set out a more strategic work programme for the year ahead.

I want to thank my fellow Committee members for their critical challenge, dedication and openness throughout the year. It is through this collective voice that scrutiny can continue to evolve and contribute meaningfully to the democratic oversight of regional governance.

As we look ahead to 2025-2026, our focus must continue to be developing the scrutiny function further, both, structurally, culturally and procedurally. We will seek to prioritise earlier and more meaningful engagement in decision making, push for greater transparency and visibility across all arms of regional governance, and ensure that the voices of our communities are reflected in regional policy and investment decisions. I am confident the Officers and members of the CJC will be keen to support the continued enhancement of this approach. We will continue to make meaningful improvement in 2025-26, taking forward a targeted and proportionate work programme, strengthen our links with CCR delivery bodies, and continue to press for clear lines of accountability and open dialogue. Our focus is on ensuring scrutiny is seen and used as a vital part of good governance, helping improve decision making, accountability, and public confidence across the region.

Councillor A. Whitcombe
Chair - CJC Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Terms of Reference

The CJC JOSC is established under the Local Authorities (Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committees) (Wales) Regulations 2013. Its statutory role is to scrutinise decisions and actions taken by the South-East Wales Corporate Joint Committee (CJC), particularly in the areas of regional transport, strategic planning, and economic wellbeing. The CJC JOSC can:

- To review or scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, in connection with the discharge of any functions which are the responsibility of the CJC;
- To make reports or recommendations to the CJC with respect to the discharge of any functions which are the responsibility of the CJC; The JOSC can also request any decision taken by the CJC be “called-in”
- Assist the CJC in reviewing service delivery and performance through in-depth analysis;
- Review and scrutinise the decisions made by and the performance of the CJC and/or any of its Chief Officers both in relation to individual decisions and over time;
- The JOSC shall review and scrutinise the performance of the CJC, and in exercising its powers, may require members of the CJC to attend a meeting of the JOSC
- Review and scrutinise the performance of the CJC in relation to its policy objectives, performance targets and/or service areas;
- Consider and implement mechanisms to encourage and enhance community participation in the development of policy or the improvement of services which the CJC is responsible for;
- Question Members of the CJC or any Sub-Committee of the CJC about their proposed policies, decisions and performance; and
- Make recommendations to the CJC and/or appropriate Sub-Committee of the CJC and/or other constitutional bodies arising from the outcome of the overview & scrutiny process

Membership and Meetings

The CJC JOSC is comprised of one substantive and one deputy non-executive elected member from each of the ten constituent local authorities within the Cardiff Capital Region. This structure ensures that all parts of the region are represented equally in the regional scrutiny process.

During the 2024-25 municipal year, [Councillor A. Whitcombe](#) (Caerphilly County Borough Council served as Chair, and [Councillor R. Bevan](#) (Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council) served as Vice Chair.

The Committee held four formal public meetings throughout the year, providing a platform to scrutinise key regional strategies and decision-making processes. In addition to these meetings, the Committee established a dedicated thematic Regional Transport Working Group, which met on five occasions to undertake a deep-dive review into the governance, delivery, and priorities of the draft regional Transport Plan.

All formal meetings of the Committee were open to the public and recorded to support openness and transparency. Meetings were administratively supported by Rhondda Cynon Taf Council as the host Authority. The agendas and minutes are all published [online](#), ensuring

that the Committee's work remained transparent, accessible, and accountable to the residents of the Cardiff Capital Region.

Training

Recognising the complexity and ambition of regional governance, the Committee placed a strong emphasis on member development at the start of the 2024-25 municipal year. All members of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee were invited to participate in a dedicated Member Induction Session, held in September 2024, hosted by the Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) Team.

The induction covered the full scope of CCR and CJC activity including:

- Overview of the Cardiff Capital Region and City Deal transition
- The statutory powers and functions of the Corporate joint Committee including:
 - Economic Wellbeing
 - Strategic Spatial planning
 - Regional Transport Planning
- The governance structure and decision-making roles of the CJC and its Sub-Committees
- Key Strategies such as the Regional Economic & Industrial Plan, and future development of the Strategic Development Plan and Regional Transport Plan
- Financial responsibilities and audit arrangements, including the SEWCJC Finance Team, internal audit processes and external audit by Audit Wales

Benefits and Impact of Training

This training equipped members with:

- A strong understanding of their scrutiny remit in a regional context
- Improved confidence in engaging with complex topics such as transport planning, ESG investment frameworks and strategic housing
- The ability to hold decision-makers to account effectively by linking scrutiny to statutory duties and regional outcomes
- Shared language and common understanding across the ten local authorities, supporting more coherent regional scrutiny

The session also fostered early discussions between members, CCR officers, and statutory leads, laying the foundation for a productive year of scrutiny.

Transition and Reflection

The 2024-25 year marked a period of significant transition for the Joint Overview and Scrutiny committee (JOSC) as the Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) moved from the City Deal governance model into the statutory framework of the Corporate Joint Committee (CJC). This shift brought with it new responsibilities, increased complexity, and higher expectations for regional oversight.

While the CJC structure brings with it new legal duties and powers, it has also introduced significant scrutiny challenges which Members of the JOSC have been open and honest in reflecting that the transition has not been without challenge. Over the past year, several structural and procedural challenges have emerged that have limited the Committee's ability to fully perform its role.

Key concerns identified include:

1. Complexity of Governance Structures

Members highlighted the increasing complexity of the CJC's governance arrangements, which now include:

- A growing number of sub-committees and working groups.
- Several externally constituted or arms lengths bodies (such as CCR Energy)
- Overlapping reporting lines and unclear accountability

At present, the Committee does not have a full or accessible picture of how these parts interconnect, or where scrutiny should be best applied.

2. Unclear Lines of Accountability

Committee members have continued to seek clarity in respect of where accountability and responsibility rests within the regional governance system, in particular:

- The distinction between CCR staff and the CJC as a statutory body is often unclear;
- Decision-making routes involving companies and delivery partners is unclear
- The public are unlikely to understand where accountability lies when decisions go wrong.

This lack of clarity not only affects scrutiny's work but risks impacting up the public's perception of regional decision making.

3. Timing and Visibility of Decisions

The Committee has repeatedly found itself retrospectively examining issues, rather than shaping decisions as they emerge. Notably, in the case of the Aberthaw demolition procurement, members were not aware of concerns until after external scrutiny had already begun. This has raised important questions about Access to timely information, early involvement in key decisions

4. Cultural and Procedural Barriers

Members have expressed concern that scrutiny has at times been treated as a procedural requirement rather than a valued contributor to governance. There is a need to:

- Embed scrutiny more meaningfully into the planning and delivery of regional strategies;
- Ensure CJC officers and partners understand the purpose and potential of scrutiny.
- Shift from passive reporting to constructive engagement and challenge.

The Committee recognises that this is still a relatively new evolving model, but it also acknowledges that scrutiny must now adapt to meet the demands of regional governance. As we look ahead to 2025-26 the Committee is committed to:

- Rebuilding scrutiny on stronger foundations.
- Developing a clearer purpose and structure
- Strengthening its position as a transparent, independent and respected regional voice

Key Reports and Scrutiny Impact

Metro Central Outline Business Case

At its meeting on the [10th October 2024](#), the CJCJOSC undertook pre-decision scrutiny of the [Metro Central Outline Business Case](#). This ambitious project centred on transforming Cardiff Central Station and its surrounding transport infrastructure, as a keystone in the Cardiff Capital Region connectivity and economic development agenda.

The Committee *examined*:

- The overall strategic rationale for the Metro Central project and how it supports regional economic and environmental goals.
- Financial implications, including anticipated funding sources, capital expenditure projections, and delivery timelines.
- The alignment of the Metro Central development with existing and future transport planning, particularly the Regional Transport Plan.
- Expected outcomes in terms of modal shift, economic uplift, and public transport accessibility across the wider region
- The importance of Metro central as a regional project; not just Cardiff investment.

Members *questioned*:

- How the business case accounted for equity of benefit across all 10 local authorities, and whether those further from Cardiff would still experience measurable improvements in connectivity
- Whether the Metro Central plan addressed the needs of underserved communities, particularly in terms of affordability and accessibility.
- What risk mitigation was in place in the event of cost inflation or funding shortfalls

Outcomes and Scrutiny Impact

- The scrutiny process helped shape both the development and future oversight of the business case in several ways:
- Reinforced the importance of regional balance, prompting officers to ensure the business case better articulated benefits to areas outside Cardiff.
- Elevated the need for multi-modal integration, ensuring that Metro Central is not only a rail project but part of a broader transport ecosystem
- Highlighted the importance of clear accountability and risk planning, especially with respect to long term funding streams
- Helped frame the Outline Business Case as a living document, subject to further scrutiny as more detail emerges, especially during final business case development.

Responsible Investment Policy and ESG Scorecard

At its meeting on the [4th February 2025](#), the CJC JOSC undertook detailed scrutiny of the Cardiff Capital Region's enhanced [Responsible Investment Policy](#) and the introduction of a new Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Scorecard.

The Committee *examined*:

- The Framework underpinning CCR's responsible investment principles
- The rationale behind the ESG Criteria and how they are applied to CCRs investments.
- How the policy aligns with broader social value objectives, including real living wage accreditation, gender pay transparency and support for SMEs.
- The flexibility and inclusivity of the scorecard, particularly for smaller businesses that may lack the resources to meet more complex ESG metrics.
- Risk assessment integration and how the ESG scorecard complements, rather than replaces, financial due diligence.

Members *challenged*:

- How CCR compares with best practices, such as those adopted by local government pension funds.
- How CCR will provide support to smaller organisations in meeting ESG expectations.
- The moral and ethical grey areas in investments, especially in sectors like life sciences and cyber.
- The transparency and consistency of impact measurement over time.

Several Members *requested*:

- A clear benchmarking process for measuring ESG impact annually.
- Assurance that early- stage dialogue and support would be offered to help companies improve their standards rather than face immediate exclusion from funding opportunities.

Outcomes and Scrutiny Impact

- The Scrutiny process influenced CCR's direction in the following ways:
- Clarified the purpose of the ESG Scorecard as a tool for meaningful engagement, not just compliance.
- Elevated the expectation for annual review and improvements to the policy, reflecting feedback and new best practices.
- Promoted the idea of proactive support, especially for SMEs, to help embed good practice rather than exclude them from investment pipelines.
- Strengthened the policy's inclusivity, recognising diverse business sizes and sectors
- Committee comments led to commitments by officers to ensure transparent implementation and evaluation, and to better communicate the intended benefits of responsible investment for communities across the region.

Portfolio Member Engagement

As part of its commitment to improving the democratic accountability and transparency, the CJC JOSJC included engagement with portfolio holders as a key feature of its 2024-25 work programme. The session provided members with an opportunity to question [Councillor A Morgan OBE](#) from the South-East Wales Corporate Joint Committee (SEWCJC) on his strategic priorities, delivery challenges and performance.

During the engagement session held in [October 2024](#) the Committee *scrutinised*:

- The clarity of roles and responsibilities across portfolio areas, especially in relation to transport, planning, skills and investment.
- The effectiveness of delivery plans underpinning the Corporate Plan and how progress was being measured.
- How cross-cutting issues like sustainability, inclusion, and economic inequality was being addressed through portfolio-level decision-making.
- The level of collaboration between the CJC and Local Authorities, and how regional strategies were being communicated and implemented at the local level.

Members *questioned*:

- How portfolio holders are prioritising investments and managing trade-offs across the region.
- What steps are being taken to ensure policies deliver tangible benefits across all communities, not just economic centres.
- How performance is monitored and reported, and what mechanisms are in place for responding to underperformance.
- Whether the portfolio holders had sufficient capacity and support to deliver on their responsibilities in a complex regional setting.

There was also strong emphasis on the need for openness and dialogue, with members encouraging more regular and structured portfolio engagement.

Outcomes and Scrutiny Impact

This line of Scrutiny strengthened the Committees role as a check and balance on executive decision making:

- Reinforced the expectation that portfolio holders are subject to open questioning and public accountability.
- Helped embed a culture of constructive challenge and transparency at the regional governance level.
- Ensured that emerging plans such as the Strategic Development Plan and Regional Transport Plan were informed by Member priorities and constituent needs.
- Laid the foundation for more frequent, structured engagement with executive leads in future years.

Regional Transport Working Group

Recognising the strategic importance of the emerging Regional Transport Plan (RTP), the CJC JOSC established a dedicated working group in October 2024 to undertake proactive and detailed pre-decision scrutiny. This was the first thematic working group formed by the JOSC and marked a significant evolution in the Committee's role - from reactive scrutiny to constructive policy development engagement.

The Working Group *focussed* on:

- The overarching governance and delivery landscape of transport planning across CCR, local Authorities, Transport for Wales and Welsh Government.
- Regional disparities in transport infrastructure and investment, particularly between bus and rail.
- The draft content and consultation scope of the Regional Transport Plan (2025-2032)
- Multi-modal integration, especially in relation to Active Travel, decarbonisation pathways, and equitable access to services.
- Best practice from metropolitan areas such as Manchester and Amsterdam, applying learning to regional ambitions.

Through five meetings held between November 2024 and February 2025, the group questioned legislative responsibilities, delivery mechanisms, funding constraints, and the role of user feedback and data in shaping the transport strategy.

Members *examined*:

- The inequality in transport access and the socio-economic impact of unreliable services, especially for young people, jobseekers, and rural communities.
- The need for multi-year strategic investment and long-term planning over reactive one year funding settlements.
- The importance of stakeholder engagement, including a proposal for a “Bus Summit” to unify operators, government and communities.
- Ensuring governance accountability and democratic oversight in transport infrastructure decisions.

The Group also drew attention to the role of local authorities as delivery agents, highlighting a need for greater clarity in roles and responsibilities

Outcomes and Scrutiny Impact

The Regional transport Working Group made a tangible impact through its formal recommendations, which were endorsed by the full JOSC and submitted to the South-East Wales Corporate Joint Committee. Outcomes included:

- 11 formal recommendations adopted to strengthen the RTP, focusing on governance, funding equity, and integration.
- Influenced extension of the consultation period for the RTP to 12 weeks – longer than the statutory minimum- following scrutiny feedback on stakeholder engagement.
- Raised the profile of bus services as central to modal shift, urging parity with rail investment decisions
- Helped define the role of the CJC as a regional advocate, not just a delivery body, especially in lobbying Welsh Government on funding challenges.

- Recommended that the Committee continues to regularly review progress on delivering the Regional Transport Plan, not just through one-off reports but by checking in at key stages over time.

Lessons Learned: Reflecting on the Regional Transport Working Group

During the year, members engaged in a dedicated scrutiny session focused on the work of the Regional Transport Working Group. While the session provided an opportunity to explore regional ambitions and emerging priorities, members expressed strong disappointment with both the process and the quality of information provided.

One of the most common concerns was the lack of clarity and accessibility in the written report that accompanied the session. Members felt the report was heavily technical and written in a way that excluded rather than enabled understanding. In particular, the excessive use of jargon and abstract terminology meant that members and in turn the public, were left with little sense of what was being delivered, or how regional transport priorities were being decided.

The Committee acknowledged the effort of officers involved and recognised the complexity of the regional transport agenda. However, the experience reinforced several wider lessons about how scrutiny is engaged.

- Meaningful engagement requires early involvement, not retrospective updates
- Technical working groups must provide real opportunities for dialogue and influence, not simply information sharing.

The Committee is clear that this approach must not be repeated. For Scrutiny to play a constructive role in regional planning and investment decisions, it must be treated as a partner in shaping strategy, not a recipient of information.

As the transport strategy evolves under the CJC, the Committee will seek assurance that:

- Scrutiny is engaged at the right time, with sufficient notice and access to materials;
- Officers understand the Committee's role as a critical friend.

Looking Ahead: Priorities for 2025–2026

As the JOSCC enters the next phase of its statutory role within the Corporate Joint Committee, members have made clear that 2025-26 must be a year of reset and renewal. Building on the lessons of the past year, and in response to specific concerns raised during the Committee's development session, scrutiny priorities for the year ahead will focus on strengthening structure, deepening visibility and improving influence.

The Committee is committed to taking forward a repositioned and purposeful scrutiny model that is proportionate, strategic and genuinely impactful in a complex regional governance environment

1. Clarifying Governance Structures and Accountability

Members have called for urgent work to make clear the current governance landscape. This will include:

- Developing a clear, accessible governance map of the CJC, its sub-committees, regional boards and accountable bodies.
- Understanding the decision-making routes within CCR companies (e.g CCR Energy Ltd) and how scrutiny interacts with those bodies.
- Seeking greater transparency on how officers and governance structures are resourced, appointed and held to account.

This work will help both members and the public understand who is responsible for what, and how scrutiny can intervene at the right point.

2. Rebuilding Scrutiny Structures and Focus

The Committee has identified the need for structural reform of its own work. In the coming year, scrutiny will:

- Review how its work programme is developed, shifting away from passive reporting to proactive selection of high value topics where pre-decision scrutiny can have influence.
- Define how and when scrutiny should engage with emerging decisions, particularly those involving risk, investment or delivery partners.
- Establish more effective deep-dive models, enabling members to explore issues in detail between formal meetings.

3. Engaging Earlier and more Strategically

The Committee will seek earlier visibility and influence on the following:

- Investment decisions and project selection criteria;
- Risk and Assurance matters, particularly in areas of external delivery or commercial sensitivity;
- The development of strategic frameworks such as transport, economic strategy, innovation and energy

This will require improved access to information, earlier involvement in decision timelines and more regular engagement with CCR leadership.

4. Improving Public Understanding and Transparency

The Committee recognises the importance of public confidence and visibility in regional decision making. Priorities for the year ahead include:

- Improving the clarity and accessibility of scrutiny outputs, including public-facing reports and summaries.
- Continuing to live stream all formal meetings, and ensuring accessible publication of agendas, reports and minutes.
- Work with communications colleagues to raise awareness of what regional scrutiny does and how it supports democratic accountability

5. Scrutiny Development Workshop

To underpin these priorities, the Committee will hold a Scrutiny Development Workshop in the early part of the Municipal year. This session will:

- Enable Members to revisit and refine the scrutiny work programme
- Agree a new set of operating principles and expectations for Members and Officers
- Review progress against the lessons learned identified in this year's annual report

This session will act as a practical starting point for delivering on the priorities set out in this report and for embedding a more confident, visible and valued scrutiny function across the region.

Closing Remarks

This report reflects a more honest assessment of where scrutiny stands and the challenges we have faced over the past year. Members have voiced consistent concerns about reports being brought in too late, receiving information that was difficult to engage with, and struggling to influence key decisions in a timely way. These are not minor issues, they are central to what effective scrutiny should be.

The year has highlighted areas where our structures and processes have not kept pace with the complexity of regional governance. It has also shown that for scrutiny to be meaningful, it needs the right tools, clearer access to information, and a stronger presence at the point where decisions are being shaped, not after they have been made.

What is clear is that there is a shared desire among members to do things differently. There is now a genuine opportunity to reset the role and purpose of scrutiny within the Cardiff Capital Region to ensure it is valued, visible, and better placed to contribute to good governance.

This Annual Report marks the beginning of that shift. It sets out not just what has happened, but what must change. Members are committed to working constructively to strengthen scrutiny to ask better questions, at the right time and in the right places so that decisions made on behalf of our communities are subject to the right level of transparency, accountability and challenge.