
NORTH WALES CJC STRATEGIC PLANNING SUB-COMMITTEE
26/01/2026

Present: Councillor Nicola Roberts (Isle of Anglesey County Council) (Chair)
Councillor Hugh Jones (Wrexham County Borough Council) (Vice-Chair)

Councillors:

Craig ab Iago (Cyngor Gwynedd), Richard Jones (Flintshire County Council), Chris Cater (Conwy County Borough Council) and Edgar Wyn Owen (Eryri National Park Authority).

Chief Officers:

Adrian Walters (Flintshire County Council), Dewi Jones (Isle of Anglesey County Council), Paul Mead (Denbighshire County Council), Gareth Jones (Cyngor Gwynedd) and Keira Sweeney (Eryri National Park Authority).

Officers present:

Alwen Williams (Chief Executive of the Corporate Joint Committee), Claire Incledon (Deputy Monitoring Officer), Andy Roberts (Regional Strategic Development Planning Officer), Dewi Morgan (Chief Finance Officer), Jasmine Jones (Democracy Services Officer) and Courtney Leigh Jones (Democracy Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from:-

- Councillor Alan James (Denbighshire County Council)
- Iwan Evans (Monitoring Officer)

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

There were no declarations of personal interest.

3. URGENT ITEMS

No urgent matters were raised.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting held on 4 September 2025 as a true record.

5. FORMAL SUBMISSION OF SDP DELIVERY AGREEMENT

The report was submitted by the Regional Strategic Development Planning Officer.

RESOLVED

To note the outcome of the reports to the Corporate Joint Committee (CJC) held on 23rd January 2026 and the next steps for the Strategic Development Plan.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

Responsibility to prepare the draft Delivery Agreement rests with the Strategic Planning Sub-Committee. The sub-committee has co-ordination and planning functions regarding each step towards delivery of the SDP.

DISCUSSION

The Regional Strategic Development Planning Officer presented a report summarising the outcome of the Corporate Joint Committee meeting held on 23 January 2026 and the steps leading to the recommendation to formally submit the Strategic Development Plan Delivery Agreement to Welsh Government for ministerial approval. It was explained that the report sets out a comprehensive audit trail which brought the Sub-Committee up to date and evidenced the stages the Delivery Agreement had progressed through. Reference was made to the background section of the report, which included signposts to the meetings at which the Sub-Committee had previously considered the Delivery Agreement and the basis on which recommendations had been made.

It was reported that September 2025 had been a key milestone, as the Sub-Committee had considered a draft version of the Delivery Agreement and its appropriateness to be submitted to Welsh Government for formal approval, subject to confirmation that the Corporate Joint Committee could set the 2026 to 2027 budget and identify the additional funding required to commence the Strategic Development Plan and sustain delivery across the five year programme. It was noted that the Corporate Joint Committee had subsequently endorsed the same conditional position on the 19th of September 2025, recognising the financial concerns raised, and that the Delivery Agreement could not progress further until the 2026 to 2027 budget had been set.

It was explained that, through the autumn budget-setting process, work had been undertaken with the Chief Finance Officer and finance officers to identify options which aligned with the previously stated requirements, namely that the additional resources required for the Strategic Development Plan should, where possible, be found from within currently available resources and should not place a substantial additional burden on local authority budgets through a significant increase to the levy. It was reported that the budget-setting process had identified a means of meeting the year one funding requirement without creating an additional levy pressure attributable to the Strategic Development Plan, and it was noted that the levy increase for 2026 to 2027 had been limited to an inflationary uplift of 3.5%.

It was stated that the estimated average annual funding requirement for delivery of the Strategic Development Plan over the five-year programme was approximately £655,000 per year. It was noted that the year one budget had been set at £597,000, reflecting the anticipated requirement for the first year rather than seeking the full average amount, and that the budget would be reviewed and set annually through the normal budget cycle.

It was reported that the ability to set the year one budget without a significant levy impact had been achieved through the use of internal resources, including an underspend against the Strategic Development Plan revenue budget in 2025 to 2026 and the securing of a Welsh Government performance grant of £200,000 during the year. It was noted that these elements had mitigated potential cost pressures on the constituent authorities and could provide similar mitigation into year two, and potentially beyond, depending on future circumstances.

In discussion, it was questioned whether Welsh Government grant funding would be available in the coming year to support the Strategic Development Plan. In response, it was noted that no prescriptive information had been issued by Welsh Government, and it was noted that certainty regarding future grants was unlikely given the proximity to the election period. It was stated that, despite there having been no funding available nine to

ten months earlier, a performance grant of £200,000 had been secured, which formed part of a £400,000 allocation across the four Corporate Joint Committees, and this demonstrated the benefit of demonstrating good progress with the plan. It was further noted that the Strategic Development Plan was one of the areas of Corporate Joint Committee work which did not automatically attract an annual grant supplement. It was noted that representations to Welsh Government would continue, with progress being used to strengthen future cases for funding, particularly post-election depending on policy priorities.

It was questioned whether interest on funds held could be used to support the Strategic Development Plan and reduce levy pressures. In response, the Chief Finance Officer reported that this had been considered within the corporate plan and budget process. It was noted that the Corporate Joint Committee remained a relatively young body and that some posts had not been filled as quickly as expected, resulting in underspends accruing. It was reported that this position had enabled the levy charged on the six councils and the National Park Authority to be kept down for 2026 to 2027. It was noted that, whilst the underspend had not been planned, the position had allowed a significant portion of funds to be applied to Strategic Development Plan delivery, helping to minimise levy increases in a context where future Welsh Government funding could not be guaranteed.

It was emphasised that the significance of submitting the Delivery Agreement to Welsh Government was not only the ability to fund year one, but the commitment to fund delivery across the full five-year programme. It was noted that the Corporate Joint Committee had held a detailed discussion regarding balances and reserves, and it was reported that maintaining reserves was a prudent approach which mitigated future financial risk and provided assurance in the event of variable funding year on year. It was noted that this approach supported a positive recommendation to proceed with formal submission, and it was reported that the financial position was considered sufficiently robust for at least the first two to three years, noting that underspends would not necessarily arise every year.

It was questioned whether a significant levy increase should be anticipated the following year if there was no further underspend and no additional Welsh Government funding. In response, it was reported that no guarantees could be provided but no large increase was expected in the levy the following year. It was noted that the approach taken created flexibility and mitigation, as the £200,000 grant would either fund revenue expenditure in-year or flow into balances as an underspend, with either route supporting the subsequent budget-setting position. It was reiterated that the Strategic Development Plan was a statutory requirement, and it was noted that funding would need to be identified through the Corporate Joint Committee's budget process rather than relying on grants, alongside ongoing efforts to secure additional external funding. It was emphasised that the project was in the best position possible financially at the start of a project of this nature.

Further information was requested in relation to the Welsh Government Strategic Performance Grant of £200,000. In response, it was clarified that the Welsh Government Performance Grant of £200,000 related to 2025 to 2026, was claimed in arrears, and it was noted that approximately £50,000 had been claimed to date with the remaining claim to be submitted at the end of the financial year. It was noted that this income would appear in the 2025 to 2026 accounts and within the strategic planning income lines in the relevant revenue monitoring information, and it was further noted that any associated underspend could be carried forward into reserves for use in 2026 to 2027.

It was reported that a mid-term financial plan covering a three-to-five-year forecast would be brought forward around September 2026 and it was noted that this would provide clearer visibility of anticipated funding and likely levy changes, with the intention that future impacts would be understood in advance of the annual budget-setting stage.

A member acknowledged that, where possible, unspent money would ordinarily be recovered given the financial strain placed on many local authorities, but it was noted that carrying funds forward into reserves to support the five-year Strategic Development Plan programme was appropriate given the statutory nature of the work, the need to minimise levy impacts, and the benefit of having mitigation available for future years. In response, it was reported that, over time, a Strategic Development Plan should reduce duplication and lead to a more streamlined and efficient approach to local development plan reviews and begin to accrue financial savings in the longer term.

6. STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN TIMETABLE 2026/27 AND KEY TASKS

The report was submitted by the Regional Strategic Development Planning Officer.

RESOLVED

To note the content of this report and that the task list presented will inform the development of the Sub-Committee work programme and co-ordination of meetings.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

Responsibility to implement the SDP Delivery Agreement rests with the Strategic Planning Sub Committee. The Sub-Committee has co-ordination and planning functions regarding each step towards delivery of the SDP.

DISCUSSION

A timetable of the Strategic Development Plan work programme for 2026 to 2027 was presented, and it was explained that the purpose of the report was to provide an early forward look, on the assumption that Welsh Government approval of the Delivery Agreement would be received, setting out the key tasks and milestones in year one of the five-year programme. It was reported that the first five or six actions in the table related mainly to procedural steps following approval of the Delivery Agreement, including approval, commencement and publication arrangements. It was also noted that recruitment formed part of these early steps, and it was reported that the approved Strategic Development Plan budget enabled the recruitment of at least one additional planner to support delivery in year one. It was emphasised that adding capacity within the Corporate Joint Committee was important to maintaining deadlines within the overall timetable.

It was reported that the later items within the timetable, particularly points seven to ten, represented more substantive stages in the year one process and would be the areas most likely to require reports to the Sub-Committee for consideration, discussion and steer, prior to matters being reported onwards to the Corporate Joint Committee. It was explained that an early substantive output would be the preparation of a Main Issues Report. It was noted that preparatory work had already commenced to put a consultancy contract in place to assist in developing the evidence base, and it was reported that this would begin with an audit of existing evidence bases that supported local development plans within each constituent authority area. It was noted that the approach was intended to avoid duplication and avoid reinventing the wheel, recognising that local authorities had already invested significant time and money in developing evidence bases, and that where evidence remained current it would be utilised rather than repeated.

It was reported that the audit would also identify evidence gaps and areas requiring updating, particularly where evidence was dated, and that this would inform where limited funding might need to be targeted to ensure a consistent regional picture. It was noted that the approach would include working with authorities who were already planning to refresh evidence bases, in order to align activity and secure best value from

limited public resources. It was reported that the Main Issues Report would draw out the regionally significant issues emerging from this evidence audit, to inform the scope and direction of the Strategic Development Plan.

It was noted that, alongside assembling the evidence base, work would also be undertaken to test emerging issues with local and regional preferences. It was reported that this would include the development of an issues vision and strategic objectives, and it was noted that this would require facilitated engagement with Sub-Committee members and other stakeholders to identify what was considered most significant for North Wales and what the Strategic Development Plan should prioritise. It was stated that this was an important conversation and that it was likely to be most effective if held face to face, although it was noted that this would be progressed in whichever format was most practical. It was further noted that the same discussions would also take place officer-to-officer with planning policy leads within each authority to understand local priorities, where local development plan reviews were progressing, and how locally significant issues combined to form a regional perspective.

It was reported that work would also be required to define a settlement hierarchy and to develop growth and spatial options. It was explained that this would include consideration of the appropriate scale of growth for North Wales over a 25-year period, including housing requirements, employment land needs, and other development considerations such as town centre retail, alongside the infrastructure needed to support growth. It was noted that the approach would seek to align with what was emerging through local development plan reviews to avoid early conflicts, and it was explained that, rather than assessing every settlement within local hierarchies, a high-level regional settlement structure would be developed, identifying the most important settlements regionally and their strategic role. It was noted that options would be developed and discussed to establish areas of agreement and consensus.

It was reported that candidate sites would be an early stage of the Strategic Development Plan process and that this would require the development of a clear methodology to define what would constitute a strategic site. It was noted that this would need to cover, for example, thresholds for strategic housing sites, mixed-use sites, employment land sites and other regionally significant forms of development. It was reported that this would lead to a call for candidate sites, with an indicative six-to-eight-week window for submissions supported by evidence, enabling landowners and parties with an interest in land at the relevant scale to put forward sites for consideration.

It was noted that, taken together, the timetable represented a full and ambitious year one programme. It was reported that the intention was for the substantive stages identified to inform a sequence of Sub-Committee meetings through the year, potentially on a quarterly basis, although it was noted that dates had not yet been set. It was also reported that meeting dates would need to be arranged in a way that dovetailed with the Corporate Joint Committee timetable, so that Sub-Committee consideration and recommendations could feed into subsequent Corporate Joint Committee decisions. It was noted that the Corporate Joint Committee meeting calendar was awaited before finalising the Sub-Committee schedule. It was reported that a formal work programme would follow, to be drafted and circulated, with an intention to settle meeting dates as early as possible.

It was questioned whether any risks had been identified which could impact on the timetable, with specific reference to recruitment and retention difficulties affecting local authorities and potential implications for the Strategic Development Plan programme. In response, it was reported that recruitment had been deliberately limited to mitigate pressure on the North Wales pool of experienced senior planners, and it was noted that, although the delivery programme referenced an internal team of four additional planners, a single additional senior support officer was being pursued for year one to balance resource needs with the risk of drawing staff from local authorities. It was reported that significant reliance would therefore be placed on consultancy support to

mitigate risk and to enable progress against ambitious timescales. It was noted that the year one budget included provision of nearly £300,000 for consultancy support, and it was reported that this was intended to secure a virtual team rather than creating direct recruitment impacts on local authorities. It was further noted that a flexible approach would be maintained, including the possibility of future secondment opportunities where appropriate, recognising both the potential benefits to the Corporate Joint Committee and the professional development opportunities for planners.

Concerns were raised regarding sustainability of consultancy use given the cost, and the risk of competing recruitment activity across authorities and the Corporate Joint Committee within the same labour market. In response, reassurance was provided that the consultants engaged were Arup, described as a national multidisciplinary consultancy, and it was noted that they had already undertaken substantial work for the Corporate Joint Committee in support of the Regional Transport Plan, including early work to build an evidence base which could also support the Local Development Plan. It was reported that this meant the programme was not starting from a blank position, and it was noted that the brief issued was to build on that earlier evidence rather than revisiting or duplicating it. It was reported that this existing dataset and prior engagement with authorities would support more efficient progress, enabling the evidence audit and Main Issues Report to move forward more quickly. It was also noted that evidence developed through this work would not be closed to the Corporate Joint Committee, and that the intention was for relevant evidence outputs to be available to local authorities to support their own work, enabling potential efficiencies and reducing the need for duplicated local consultancy commissions.

It was questioned whether the Strategic Development Plan would impose policy changes on individual councils and the National Park Authority, and whether it could be used to support specific local challenges, with an example raised in relation to managing holiday homes and second homes and the use of thresholds across different communities compared to an area-wide approach. In response, it was noted that the Strategic Development Plan should be viewed as an opportunity to shape regionally relevant and, where appropriate, sub-regional policies through discussion and agreement. It was reported that the approach would not be for the Corporate Joint Committee to impose policy on authorities, but to work collaboratively to develop policies that worked positively for relevant areas and could be interpreted and applied through local policy contexts once the Strategic Development Plan was adopted. It was noted that the type of issue raised would be an example of a matter to bring forward into those discussions, to inform how an effective policy could be developed.

Following the discussion, additional proposals were raised to support effective working arrangements: -

1. It was agreed that the meeting scheduled for 9th March 2026 be held in person to facilitate more informal discussion and strengthen working relationships.
2. It was proposed that a member training programme be developed in the background alongside the formal meeting cycle, potentially delivered virtually four to five times per year, to build understanding of process, context and key topics. It was suggested that an initial session could include input from Welsh Government by inviting the head of the development plans branch to provide an overview of the Strategic Development Plan process and the role of members, potentially scheduled ahead of the in-person meeting in March. It was noted that a library of materials could be maintained so that sessions could be revisited and accessed by those unable to attend. Agreement was indicated that training would be beneficial, and it was requested by members that the training be flexible and responsive to topics arising through the programme, rather than fixed too far in advance.
3. It was proposed that regular informal updates be provided outside formal meetings, for example through a short monthly email update or newsletter-style or blog format,

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to keep members sighted on progress and next steps, and to create an accessible audit trail of updates over time. Support was indicated for receiving such updates.

The meeting commenced at 14:06 and concluded at 15:10.

Chair