Cyd-bwyllgor Corfforedig De-Ddwyrain Cymru | South East Wales Corporate Joint Committee

Strategic Development Sub-Committee

Summons to attend a meeting of the Strategic Development Sub-Committee	**Wednesday, 23 September 2026**

You are summoned to attend a multi-location meeting of the **Strategic Development Sub-Committee** which will be held via on Wednesday, 23 September 2026 at 12.00 pm to transact the business set out in the agenda attached.

Jill Byron **Strategic Director Legal & Governance** **Monitoring Officer**	**Thursday 17 September 2026**

Members of the Strategic Development Sub-Committee

Councillor Ann Crimmings (Chair)	Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC
Councillor Lis Burnett (Deputy Chair)	Vale of Glamorgan Council
Councillor Dan De'Ath	Cardiff Council
Councillor Neelo Farr	Bridgend County Borough Council
Councillor Joanne Gauden	Torfaen County Borough Council
Councillor John Morgan	Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
Councillor Mark Norris	Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
Councillor Ruba Sivagnanam	Vale of Glamorgan Council
Councillor James Clarke	Newport City Council
Councillor Paul Griffiths	Monmouthshire County Borough Council
Councillor David Jones	Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
Councillor Philippa Leonard	Caerphilly County Borough Council
Steve Rayner	Bannau Brycheiniog NPA

This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg

Webcasting

This meeting will be filmed for live and/or subsequent broadcast on the Corporate Joint Committee's website. The whole of the meeting will be filmed, except where there are confidential or exempt items, and the footage will be on the website for 6 months. A copy of it will also be retained in accordance with the Corporate Joint Committee's data retention policy.

If you make a representation to the meeting, you will be deemed to have consented to being filmed.

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Email: democraticservices@cardiffcapitalregion.gov.uk

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1. **Apologies for Absence**

To receive apologies for absence.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

To receive declarations of interest (such declarations to be made in accordance with the Members Code of Conduct).

3. **Minutes of the Strategic Development Sub-Committee - 10 March 2026** 5 - 8

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Sub-Committee held on 10 March 2026.

4. **Settlement Hierarchy Assessment** 9 - 30

To receive a report that provides an update on progress against a specific requirement of the SDP and explains how it will be assessed.

5. **Exempt/Confidential Report**

That, under the provisions of Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting for the consideration of the Section Two business on the grounds that it contains information defined as Exempt in Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972.

6. **Emerging Regional Settlement Hierarchy Assessment – Emerging Hierarchy** 31 - 46

Para 4
This report is to follow the accompanying report on the Regional Settlement Hierarchy Assessment and present the emerging Regional Settlement Hierarchy for consideration by the Strategic Development Sub Committee.

7. **Any Other Business**

To receive Any Other Business.

8. **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting of the Strategic Development Sub-Committee is to be held on 4 November 2026 commencing at 9.00am on Microsoft Teams.

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Cyd-bwyllgor Corfforedig De-Ddwyrain Cymru | South East Wales Corporate Joint Committee

Meeting of the Strategic Development Sub-Committee

11.30am on Tuesday 10 March 2026
via Microsoft Teams

Minutes

Sub-Committee Members		
Name	**Position**	**Authority**
Cllr Lis Burnett (Chair)	CJC Member	Vale of Glamorgan
Cllr Andrew Morgan (Deputy Chair)	CJC Member	Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC
Cllr Dan De'Ath	Sub-Committee Member	Cardiff Council
Cllr Neelo Farr	Sub-Committee Member	Bridgend CBC
Cllr Joanne Gauden	Sub-Committee Member	Torfaen CBC
Cllr Paul Griffiths	Sub-Committee Member	Monmouthshire CC
Cllr David Jones	Sub-Committee Member	Merthyr Tydfil CBC
Cllr Mark Norris	Sub-Committee Member	Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC
Mr Steve Rayner	Sub-Committee Member	Bannau Brycheiniog NPA
Officers		
Richard Matthams	Head of Strategic Development	Cardiff Capital Region (CCR)
Cliona May	Democratic Services Manager	CCR
Jim Bailey	Head of Planning	Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC
Andrew Ferguson	Planning and Development Manager	Newport CC
Simon Gilbert	Head of Planning	Cardiff Council
Robert Murray	Head of Planning	Torfaen CBC
Jonathan Parsons	Planning and Strategic Transportation Manager	Bridgend CBC
Ryan Thomas	Planning Services Manager	Caerphilly CBC
Craig Watkins	Planning Services Manager	Merthyr Tydfil CBC

1. Apologies for Absence

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Phillipa Leonard, Caerphilly CBC, Councillor James Clarke, Newport CC, and Cllr John Morgan, Blaenau Gwent CBC.

2. Declarations of Interests

2.1 There were no declarations of interests.

3. Strategic Development Plan – Visioning Workshop Report

3.1 The Strategic Development Sub-Committee received a report from the Strategic Director for Policy, Impact & Partnerships which summarised the outcomes of a non-statutory Visioning Workshop undertaken to inform the early preparation of the Cardiff Capital Region Strategic Development Plan (SDP). The report did not establish policy, determine the spatial strategy, or prejudice future decisions. All matters would be subject to statutory plan-making requirements, formal consultation, sustainability appraisal and independent examination.

3.2 The Head of Strategic Development introduced the report and explained that the workshop was independently facilitated by the Design Commission for Wales, whose expertise in placemaking and strategic thinking provided an impartial and constructive environment for discussion. Elected Members and senior officers from all ten constituent Local Planning Authorities participated to identify shared strengths, challenges and priorities, and to begin shaping a collective regional direction. It was noted that participants had expressed strong support for the SDP as a unified statutory framework through which the Region can coordinate investment, align priorities and address cross-boundary planning issues that cannot be resolved at local level. Members had emphasised the importance of long-term spatial planning grounded in sustainable development, integrated infrastructure provision and responsibility to future generations. Members had considered the Region's distinctive assets and had also identified key strategic challenges, which were outlined within the report. The workshop outputs had been synthesised into a framework of strategic issues structured around the ambitions of a Stronger, Fairer and Greener Region, aligned with the Cardiff Capital Region Economic Wellbeing Strategy.

3.3 The Head of Strategic Development concluded by outlining the recommendations to the Strategic Development Sub-Committee, which were to note the report, adopt the report as a sound and proportionate initial framework and to agree in principle to structure the emerging SDP Vision and Strategic Objectives around the ambitions of a Stronger, Fairer and Greener Region. A further meeting of the Sub-Committee would be held, where a final report would be presented for consideration, ahead of recommending approval to a future meeting of the Corporate Joint Committee.

3.4 During the discussion, the Sub-Committee thanked the officers for their report and noted that, whilst it was a fair reflection of the discussion held at the workshop, there were a few key points that needed to be strengthened. The Sub-Committee noted the following:

- There had been discussions regarding the importance of the A465, Heads of the Valleys Road, in relation to connectivity across the region and to the Valleys. This was discussed as part of the bigger conversation on connectivity and the Metro;
- The report referred to the ten local authority leaders but had not included the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority (BBNPA) representative as a key consultee, despite holding a membership on the Corporate Joint Committee and the Strategic Development Sub-Committee;
- The discussion held had focused on a strategic approach, whereas the report sounded quite localised. It was agreed that the messaging at the workshop had been clear about focusing on polycentric growth and the opportunity to share the benefits across the region. It was requested for this to be considered when moving from the visioning stage to drafting the strategy.

3.5 In response to the report amendment requests, the Head of Strategic Development thanked the Sub-Committee and agreed to them in full. He noted that an addendum would be provided to cover the points above and circulated for approval from the Sub-Committee, and would be included in the full report going forward.

3.6 Further points were raised during the discussion, including the importance of defining areas on their potential, rather than on their history. The importance of the BBNPA playing a key role in the SDP was also noted, due to the large number of visitors throughout the year, from both tourists and local residents.

3.7 The Head of Strategic Development thanked the Sub-Committee for the discussion and noted that a draft document regarding the engagement around the SDP would be drafted and circulated to members for input. He also extended his thanks to the Design Commission for Wales (DCfW) and the officers for their participation.

3.8 Following the discussion, the Strategic Development Sub-Committee **RESOLVED** to:

1) Note the Visioning Workshop Report and the synthesis of workshop outputs into key strategic issues and overarching core principles to guide early SDP preparation.
2) Adopt the report as a sound and proportionate initial framework to inform the development of the SDP Vision and Strategic Objectives.
3) Agree in principle to structure the emerging SDP Vision and Strategic Objectives around the ambitions of a Stronger, Fairer and Greener Region, aligning spatial planning priorities with the Cardiff Capital Region Economic Wellbeing Strategy, subject to statutory planning requirements and national policy conformity.

4. Any Other Business

4.1 The Head of Strategic Development provided the Sub-Committee with the following updates:

- John Raine had been appointed to the Strategic Development team within Cardiff Capital Region; he previously worked in one of the local authorities;

- The ‘Call for Candidate Sites’, a formal consultation asking landowners, developers, and the public to suggest plots of land or buildings for potential future developments, would be paused until after the pre-election period;
- The Sub-Committee requested a further discussion on the Call for Candidate Sites, ahead of the consultation commencing.

5. Any Other Business

5.1 The date of the next meeting would be scheduled for early April 2026.

The meeting concluded at 1208 hours.

Cyd-bwyllgor Corfforedig De-Ddwyrain Cymru | South East Wales Corporate Joint Committee

Report for:	NOTING

For Consideration By	Strategic Development Sub-Committee
Report Title	Emerging Regional Settlement Hierarchy Assessment
Report of	Head of Strategic Development
Contact Details	Richard Matthams, Head of Strategic Development
Date to be Considered	23 September 2026
Affected Council Areas	All
Keywords / Index	Settlement Hierarchy & SDP

1. Recommendations

1.1 The Strategic Development Committee is asked to:

(1) note the purpose, methodology and scope of the Regional Settlement Hierarchy Assessment;

(2) note the emerging regional settlement structure and the key spatial messages arising from the assessment, including the importance of the region's polycentric settlement pattern and the different and complementary roles performed by settlements across all tiers of the hierarchy;

(3) note the supporting evidence base and technical studies identified within Appendices A–M and that these studies are at an advanced stage of preparation but remain subject to final quality assurance and refinement;

(4) note that informal input from Local Authority officers has helped to inform and shape the emerging assessment and that further officer review of the relevant technical evidence will be undertaken prior to finalisation;

(5) note the structured approach through which the underlying technical evidence, Local Authority Settlement Assessments and wider regional evidence are integrated and moderated to inform the emerging and ultimately final Regional Settlement Hierarchy;

(6) note the proposed next stage of technical quality assurance, regional consistency checking and further engagement with officers from the ten Local Authorities to test, verify and refine the supporting evidence; and

2. Report Summary

2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Strategic Development Sub-Committee with an overview of the emerging Regional Settlement Hierarchy Assessment (RSHA) being prepared as part of the evidence base for the Cardiff Capital Region Strategic Development Plan (SDP).

2.2 The report explains:

a) what the Regional Settlement Hierarchy Assessment is and why it is required;
b) the emerging structure of the Regional Settlement Hierarchy;
c) its role in supporting preparation of the SDP Spatial Strategy;
d) the key spatial messages emerging from the evidence;
e) the methodology used to assess settlements consistently across the region;
f) the supporting evidence and technical studies that underpin the assessment;
g) the role of professional planning judgement and regional moderation in informing the emerging hierarchy.

2.3 The Regional Settlement Hierarchy is an important component of the SDP evidence base. It provides a consistent regional understanding of the relative role, function, accessibility, and capacity of settlements across the ten Local Planning Authority areas.

2.4 It is important to emphasise that the Settlement Hierarchy does **not** determine the distribution of development, identify strategic development sites or establish housing requirements. Its purpose is to provide a robust spatial framework that can subsequently be considered alongside the wider SDP evidence base when developing and testing alternative spatial strategies.

2.5 The accompanying exempt report presents the emerging settlement classifications for Member consideration. This report focuses upon the methodology, supporting evidence, strategic findings, and role of the hierarchy within the wider SDP process.

3. Reasons for Report

3.1 Background

3.1.1. Cardiff Capital Region contains a complex and highly interconnected pattern of cities, towns, Valleys communities, coastal settlements, rural areas, and functional settlement clusters. These places perform different but complementary roles within the regional economy and settlement network.

3.1.2. Administrative boundaries do not necessarily reflect the way in which settlements operate. Communities may rely upon neighbouring settlements for employment, education, healthcare, retail, and other services, while transport corridors and commuting patterns create relationships extending across Local Authority boundaries.

3.1.3. A regional approach is therefore required to understand the relative role of settlements consistently across the SDP area and to provide an evidence-based framework for considering the future spatial distribution of development and investment.

3.1.4. The Regional Settlement Hierarchy Assessment has been developed for this purpose. The methodology establishes a structured, systematic, and transparent framework for evaluating settlements and is specifically intended to provide a clear and auditable relationship between the evidence considered, the assessment undertaken and the resulting settlement classification.

3.1.5. The assessment is deliberately strategic and proportionate. It identifies strategically significant settlements and functional settlement clusters and supports consideration of the broad distribution of growth. It does not seek to replicate the more detailed local or site-specific assessments undertaken through Local Development Plans.

3.2 What is the Regional Settlement Hierarchy?

3.2.1. The Regional Settlement Hierarchy provides a consistent framework for understanding how settlements function within the region and their relative strategic role.

3.2.2. Rather than simply ranking settlements according to population size, the assessment considers three overarching criteria:

- **Role, Services and Function** – the extent to which a settlement acts as a focus for population, employment, services, and activity and serves a wider catchment;

- **Accessibility to Jobs, Services and Education** – including strategic public transport, regional connectivity, access to higher-order centres, employment opportunities, education, and healthcare; and

- **Capacity and Constraints** – the broad ability of a settlement to accommodate future development having regard to development capacity, infrastructure, environmental constraints, and deliverability.

3.2.3. These criteria and their supporting indicators are established through the assessment methodology.

3.2.4. The approach is evidence-led but intentionally non-numerical. Indicators are not simply scored, weighted, and added together to produce a mechanical ranking. Instead, the evidence is considered collectively and interpreted through professional planning judgement. This avoids creating false precision while retaining a structured, consistent, and auditable assessment process.

3.2.5. The assessment also recognises that some settlements function collectively. Where justified by evidence, settlements can therefore be considered as **functional settlement clusters**, recognising relationships based upon proximity, functional integration, the distribution of services and functions and shared catchments.

3.3 Emerging Regional Settlement Hierarchy Structure

3.3.1 The emerging assessment is based upon a four-tier regional hierarchy. The highest tier reflects the strategic hierarchy already established through Future Wales, which identifies Cardiff and Newport as the principal higher-order urban centres within the South East Wales National Growth Area.

3.3.2 The Regional Settlement Hierarchy Assessment therefore does not seek to re-assess whether Cardiff and Newport should sit at the top of the hierarchy but instead distinguishes their respective regional roles and applies the detailed comparative assessment principally to the remaining settlements and functional settlement clusters across the region.

Tier 1a – Capital City

Cardiff.

Tier 1b – Regional City

Newport.

Tier 2 – Regional Hubs

The most significant settlements, urban areas, functional settlement clusters and, where justified by the evidence, strategically significant geographies outside Tier 1. These generally perform an important regional or sub-regional role through their concentration of employment, services, facilities, connectivity, and wider catchment.

Tier 3 – Key Service Centres

Settlements performing an important local service-centre role, providing employment, services and facilities to their own population and a wider local catchment.

Tier 4 – Local and Rural Settlements

Smaller settlements, villages, and communities whose role is principally local within the wider regional settlement network.

3.3.3 The distinction between the tiers reflects function rather than simply settlement size. Accessibility alone does not justify a higher classification where a settlement has limited services or employment functions, while strategically significant employment or infrastructure functions can be material where these contribute to a settlement, cluster, or wider area's regional role.

3.3.4 The hierarchy should not therefore be interpreted simply as a ranking of places by importance. The tiers provide a framework for understanding the different and complementary roles performed by places within the regional settlement network.

3.3.5 The detailed emerging settlement classifications arising from this structure are presented separately for Member consideration through the accompanying exempt report.

3.4 Role in Supporting the Strategic Development Plan

3.4.1 The Regional Settlement Hierarchy is not an end in itself. Its principal purpose is to provide one of the key spatial evidence inputs to preparation of the SDP Spatial Strategy.

3.4.2 The hierarchy provides a consistent understanding of the relative role and function of settlements across the region and will help inform consideration of where different forms and scales of growth may most appropriately be directed.

3.4.3 In broad terms, higher-tier settlements may provide opportunities for strategic growth, regeneration, infrastructure investment, and transport-led

development, while the role of other settlements will need to reflect their particular function, character, accessibility and capacity within the wider regional network.

3.4.4 The hierarchy does not, however, determine the amount of development that should be accommodated within individual settlements or Local Authority areas. The eventual distribution of growth will require the hierarchy to be considered alongside the wider SDP evidence base, including the Regional Economic and Housing Evidence Base and resulting housing requirement; employment and economic evidence; development capacity; strategic constraints; transport and accessibility; infrastructure requirements; environmental and sustainability evidence.

3.4.5 When considered alongside this wider evidence, the hierarchy will help the SDP consider where strategic growth can most sustainably be focused, how development can reinforce the role of existing settlements, where growth can align with public transport and infrastructure investment, and how housing, employment and regeneration can be more effectively integrated. It will also provide a common regional framework for considering functional and cross-boundary relationships that cannot adequately be understood through individual Local Development Plans in isolation.

3.4.6 The hierarchy therefore provides an important **spatial framework for decision-making and a bridge between the technical evidence base and the emerging SDP Spatial Strategy**. It does not represent a development distribution in its own right.

3.5 What the Emerging Evidence is Telling Us

3.5.1 While the Regional Settlement Hierarchy Assessment does not determine the future distribution of growth, the evidence assembled to date is beginning to provide a clearer understanding of the spatial structure and functioning of the region.

3.5.2 At a high level, the emerging evidence indicates that the region does not operate as a simple hierarchy of individual towns and cities. It is a **polycentric and interconnected region**, with significant relationships between settlements, employment areas, transport corridors and service centres extending across Local Authority boundaries. Importantly, each tier performs a different and complementary role within this wider regional network.

3.5.3 A number of broad findings are emerging from the assessment.

- **Cardiff and Newport perform distinct higher-order regional roles.** Their position at the top of the hierarchy reflects the strategic framework

established through Future Wales and their concentration of employment, services, infrastructure and regional functions.

- **A strong network of Tier 2 Regional Hubs is fundamental to a more polycentric region.** Alongside Cardiff and Newport, the emerging evidence identifies a diverse network of strategically important towns, urban areas, functional settlement clusters and strategic economic geographies which collectively perform significant and complementary roles in employment, services, accessibility, regeneration and supporting surrounding communities. Strengthening their individual and collective roles, and improving connections between them and with the wider regional network, will be important to supporting a more balanced and polycentric pattern of growth, opportunity and investment across the region.

- **Tier 3 Key Service Centres provide an important network of locally significant places across the region.** These settlements may not perform the same regional role or operate at the same scale as Tier 1 and Tier 2 locations, but they nevertheless form an important component of the regional settlement network. They provide employment, shops, schools, community facilities and other day-to-day services to their own populations and surrounding communities and, in many cases, provide an important interface between the larger urban centres and smaller settlements. Maintaining and strengthening their service role, accessibility, vitality and resilience will therefore be important to supporting sustainable communities across the whole region.

- **Tier 4 Local and Rural Settlements remain an important part of the regional settlement pattern.** The hierarchy should not be interpreted as suggesting that smaller settlements, villages and rural communities are less important to the future of the region. Their role is different from that of the higher tiers, but they contribute significantly to the social, economic, environmental and cultural fabric of the region and, particularly within rural areas, form part of wider networks of communities that depend upon one another and upon nearby service centres.

- The SDP will therefore need to recognise the particular needs and opportunities of rural and smaller communities, including access to services, sustainable transport and digital connectivity, local employment, housing needs, community resilience and the relationship between settlements and the surrounding countryside. The purpose of Tier 4 is to recognise the more localised role of these places within the regional hierarchy, not to diminish their importance or suggest that they should be excluded from appropriate investment or development.

- **The Valleys contain a particularly complex and polycentric settlement structure.** In several areas, individual settlements do not operate in isolation but form part of wider functional clusters. The assessment therefore identifies circumstances where the collective role of a group of settlements is more strategically significant than would be apparent from considering each settlement separately.

- **Strategic connectivity is fundamental to the way the region functions.** Rail, Metro, bus and strategic highway corridors, together with commuting and labour-market relationships, demonstrate strong functional relationships between settlements and major employment areas. However, levels of sustainable accessibility vary considerably across the region, including between urban, Valleys and rural communities. These relationships reinforce the importance of **close alignment and integration between the SDP and the Regional Transport Plan (RTP)**, ensuring that the emerging spatial strategy and regional transport priorities are developed together so that future growth is supported by sustainable connectivity and, where appropriate, transport investment helps shape and unlock opportunities for growth and regeneration.

- **Employment and economic functions are not confined to traditional town and city centres.** The evidence identifies strategically important employment locations, infrastructure assets and economic corridors whose regional significance needs to be understood alongside conventional settlement functions.

- **Development capacity is unevenly distributed.** Existing development pipelines, regeneration opportunities and potential capacity vary considerably between settlements and parts of the region. Settlement role alone cannot therefore determine where future growth should be accommodated.

- **Environmental and physical constraints are also unevenly distributed.** Flood risk, topography, environmental designations and other strategic constraints affect the realistic growth potential of different locations and will need to be considered alongside settlement role and accessibility.

- **There is no single indicator of a sustainable location for growth.** The emerging evidence reinforces the need to consider settlement function, accessibility, development capacity, constraints, infrastructure and deliverability together rather than relying upon any one factor in isolation.

3.5.4 Taken together, these findings suggest that the SDP Spatial Strategy will need to respond to the region as an interconnected network of cities, Regional Hubs, Key Service Centres, smaller settlements and rural communities, rather than simply distributing development according to administrative boundaries or settlement size.

3.5.5 This is particularly important to the concept of a polycentric region. Polycentricity does not mean that every place performs the same role or accommodates the same scale of development. Rather, it recognises that different places perform **different but complementary functions**, and that the strength of the region depends upon the relationships and connections between them.

3.5.6 The evidence also demonstrates why the Settlement Hierarchy should not itself be treated as a growth strategy. A settlement may perform an important regional or local function but have significant constraints or infrastructure requirements; conversely, development capacity may exist in locations where the existing settlement role or sustainable accessibility is more limited.

3.5.7 The next stage of SDP preparation will therefore bring the Settlement Hierarchy together with the housing and economic evidence, development capacity, strategic constraints, transport and infrastructure evidence and Strategic Candidate Sites assessment to develop and test alternative spatial strategy options.

3.5.8 The emerging message is consequently one of alignment and complementarity: the most sustainable spatial strategy will need to align the role and function of places with accessibility, development capacity, infrastructure, environmental considerations and opportunities for regeneration and investment, while recognising the contribution that settlements at all levels of the hierarchy make to a successful, balanced and polycentric region.

3.6 How the Assessment Has Been Undertaken

3.6.1 The methodology establishes five principal stages.

Stage 1 – Definition of Settlements and Functional Settlement Clusters

The settlements and, where appropriate, functional clusters to be assessed are identified. Cluster identification considers spatial relationships, functional integration, the distribution of services and functions and shared catchments.

Stage 2 – Evidence Assembly and Indicator Review

A consistent evidence base is assembled for each settlement or cluster covering role and function, accessibility, development capacity and constraints.

Stage 3 – Criterion-Level Assessment

The evidence is interpreted against the three overarching criteria. Performance is characterised as Strong, Moderate or Limited, supported by a written explanation rather than a numerical score.

Stage 4 – Initial Settlement Classification

The criterion-level findings are translated into an initial indicative tier classification.

Stage 5 – Moderation and Final Determination

The initial classifications are reviewed across the region to identify anomalies and ensure that functional geography, transport relationships, economic roles, development capacity and strategic considerations have been properly reflected.

3.6.2 This staged process provides a clear audit trail between the underlying evidence, the emerging classifications and ultimately the final Regional Settlement Hierarchy.

3.6.3 **Supporting Evidence Base**

3.6.4 The Settlement Hierarchy Assessment is supported by a substantial suite of technical evidence. This has been deliberately structured so that the hierarchy can be traced back through the assessment process to the underlying evidence and datasets.

3.6.5 The principal components of the evidence base are summarised below.

Appendix	Evidence	Purpose
A	**Regional Settlement Hierarchy Assessment Methodology**	Establishes the common assessment framework, criteria and indicators and the approach to settlement clusters, classification, moderation and quality assurance.
B	**Regional Cluster Analysis**	Identifies where settlements should be considered collectively because they operate as functional settlement clusters.

C1–C10	**Local Authority Settlement Assessments**	Provides the principal settlement-level assessments for each of the ten Local Planning Authorities, bringing together the evidence and applying the common regional methodology.
D1	**Regional Functional Economic Geography and Strategic Connectivity Assessment**	Examines strategic employment relationships, commuting and labour-market patterns, transport corridors and cross-boundary relationships to understand how the region functions.
D2	**Active Travel and Sustainable Accessibility – Strategic Spatial Assessment**	Examines sustainable accessibility and the relationship between the regional settlement structure, active travel, public transport and wider connectivity.
E	**Strategic Development Capacity Assessment**	Provides strategic comparative evidence on development pipelines, land availability, regeneration opportunities and broad development capacity.
F	**Strategic Constraints Assessment**	Identifies the principal environmental and physical constraints affecting the broad development potential of different parts of the region.
G	**Regional Settlement Hierarchy**	Brings together the assessment process and presents the resulting hierarchy, tier definitions and settlement and functional cluster classifications.
H–M	**Primary Technical Audits**	Provides detailed supporting evidence on accessibility, retail and service function, education, employment, healthcare and leisure and cultural functions.

3.6.6 The evidence architecture is intended to ensure that the hierarchy does not rely upon any single study or dataset. The primary technical audits provide the underlying factual evidence; the regional technical studies provide the wider functional, connectivity, capacity and constraints context; and the Local Authority Settlement Assessments bring these different strands together at settlement and functional cluster level.

3.6.7 **Status and Finalisation of the Technical Evidence**

3.6.8 The technical studies and supporting audits described above are at an advanced stage of preparation and have provided the evidence necessary to inform the emerging Regional Settlement Hierarchy. They are not, however, being presented to the Sub-Committee as final documents at this stage.

3.6.9 Before the individual studies are finalised, further work is required to complete detailed quality assurance and document preparation. This includes final consistency checks between the different evidence studies, completion and refinement of mapping and supporting material, standardisation of presentation and terminology, and ensuring that the overall evidence trail is clear and consistent across all ten Local Authority areas.

3.6.10 The emerging work has already benefited from ongoing and informal discussion with officers from the Local Authorities, which has helped provide local context, test assumptions and refine the understanding of settlement roles and functional relationships.

3.6.11 Before the technical studies are finalised, it is proposed that relevant studies are shared more systematically with officers across the ten Local Authorities. This will provide a further opportunity to review the evidence, identify factual matters requiring clarification or correction and assist in refining the assessments.

3.6.12 This officer engagement will not replace the regional methodology or moderation process, nor will it provide individual authorities with a mechanism to determine settlement classifications. Its purpose is to **test, verify and strengthen the evidence** before the technical studies and hierarchy are finalised.

3.6.13 Following completion of this quality assurance and officer engagement process, the technical studies and final Regional Settlement Hierarchy will be presented to the Strategic Development Sub-Committee as completed components of the SDP evidence base.

3.6.14 **Bringing the Evidence Together**

3.6.15 The strength of the Regional Settlement Hierarchy Assessment lies not in any individual dataset or technical study but in the way in which the evidence is integrated.

3.6.16 In evidential terms, the process brings together the common Assessment Methodology, Functional Cluster Analysis, Primary Technical Audits and wider Regional Technical Assessments to inform the Local Authority Settlement Assessments.

3.6.17 These are considered collectively through Integrated Regional Assessment, Moderation and Professional Planning Judgement, resulting initially in the emerging hierarchy presented separately to Members and, following completion of the remaining quality assurance and officer engagement, the Final Regional Settlement Hierarchy.

3.6.18 The final hierarchy will in turn become evidence input to preparation and testing of the SDP Spatial Strategy.

3.6.19 This process is intended to ensure that the resulting classifications are consistent across Local Authority boundaries and properly reflect the strategic role of settlements within the wider region.

3.6.20 A clear audit trail is maintained recording the evidence considered, the interpretation applied, the justification for conclusions and any changes arising through the moderation process.

3.6.21 **Moderation and Professional Planning Judgement**

3.6.22 A settlement hierarchy covering ten Local Authority areas cannot appropriately be produced through a purely mechanical scoring exercise. The methodology therefore includes a formal moderation stage.

3.6.23 Moderation allows the initial classifications to be tested against the wider regional evidence, including transport and connectivity, commuting and labour-market relationships, development capacity, strategic constraints, economic development and regeneration considerations and the relationship between settlements and functional clusters.

3.6.24 This is not intended to provide an opportunity to override the evidence or produce predetermined outcomes. Any change arising from moderation must be explicitly justified, reference the evidence relied upon and demonstrate consistency with the treatment of comparable settlements elsewhere in the region.

3.6.25 Cross-authority comparison and moderation are particularly important to ensure that similar settlements are treated consistently regardless of the Local Authority area within which they are located.

3.7 What the Settlement Hierarchy Does Not Do

3.7.1 While the hierarchy will be an important input into the SDP Spatial Strategy, it is equally important to be clear about the limitations of the assessment.

3.7.2 Classification within a higher tier does not automatically mean that a settlement will receive a particular level of housing or employment growth. Conversely, classification within a lower tier does not prevent appropriate development taking place.

3.7.3 The hierarchy does not:

a) determine the regional housing requirement;

b) allocate housing or employment development between Local Authorities;

c) allocate individual development sites;

d) define settlement boundaries;

e) replace Local Development Plan evidence;

f) determine infrastructure investment in isolation; or

g) predetermine the SDP Spatial Strategy.

3.7.4 These distinctions are important because the hierarchy operates at a strategic regional scale. It is not intended to replicate detailed local-level assessments, provide site-specific conclusions, replace Local Development Plan evidence or determine land allocations or detailed development boundaries.

3.8 Next Steps

3.8.1 The Regional Settlement Hierarchy Assessment and its supporting technical evidence are now at an advanced stage. The next phase will focus on final quality assurance, consistency checking and refinement of the supporting documents.

3.8.2 Building upon the informal Local Authority officer input received during preparation of the work, relevant technical studies will be shared with officers from the ten Local Authorities to provide a further opportunity to test and verify factual information and refine the evidence before finalisation.

3.8.3 Any matters arising through this process will be considered against the agreed regional methodology. Where amendments to the evidence or emerging classifications are considered necessary, these will be recorded and justified through the regional moderation and audit process.

3.8.4 In parallel, the emerging findings from the Settlement Hierarchy will continue to be considered alongside the wider SDP evidence base, including the emerging housing and economic evidence, transport evidence, strategic constraints, development capacity, and infrastructure considerations.

3.8.5 Following completion of the technical evidence, quality assurance and Local Authority officer engagement, the final suite of Settlement Hierarchy evidence will be brought back to the Strategic Development Sub-Committee. This will provide Members with the completed evidence base and a clear audit trail

demonstrating how the final Regional Settlement Hierarchy has been derived.

3.8.6 The hierarchy will subsequently inform the preparation and testing of alternative spatial strategy options. It should therefore be regarded as key evidence input into the next stage of SDP preparation rather than a decision on the future distribution of growth.

3.8.7 As the Spatial Strategy develops, the relationship between settlement function, development capacity, connectivity, infrastructure requirements and the scale and distribution of growth will be tested through the wider statutory plan-making and assessment processes.

3.9 Conclusion

3.9.1 The Regional Settlement Hierarchy Assessment represents one of the principal spatial evidence studies supporting preparation of the Strategic Development Plan.

3.9.2 It provides a consistent framework for understanding the role and function of settlements across all ten Local Authority areas and, critically, considers those settlements as part of a single interconnected regional system.

3.9.3 The emerging evidence points towards an emerging **polycentric regional structure**. Cardiff and Newport perform important higher-order functions, complemented by a strong network of Regional Hubs performing significant strategic and sub-regional roles. Key Service Centres provide an important network of employment, services and facilities across the region, while smaller settlements and rural communities remain integral to the social, economic, environmental and cultural fabric of the region.

3.9.4 The hierarchy should therefore not be interpreted simply as a ranking of places by importance. Rather, it provides a framework for understanding the **different and complementary roles that places perform within the regional settlement network** and the relationships between them.

3.9.5 The assessment is supported by a substantial evidence base encompassing settlement function, services, employment, accessibility, education, healthcare, active travel, functional economic geography, development capacity and strategic constraints.

3.9.6 The technical studies are at an advanced stage of preparation, and the emerging work has already benefited from informal Local Authority officer input. Completing the remaining quality assurance and providing a further opportunity for Local Authority officers to review the relevant technical evidence will strengthen the evidence base and provide greater confidence in the final documents.

3.9.7 The approach is deliberately evidence-led but not mechanistic. Professional planning judgement and moderation are retained within a structured and auditable methodology so that the hierarchy reflects the functional geography of the region rather than simply the outcome of numerical scoring.

3.9.8 The resulting hierarchy will provide an important foundation for the emerging SDP Spatial Strategy. It will help identify the places capable of performing different and complementary strategic and local roles and provide a consistent regional framework against which alternative patterns of growth, infrastructure and investment can subsequently be considered.

3.9.9 The Settlement Hierarchy should therefore be understood as **the spatial framework that helps inform where growth could be sustainably directed; it is not, by itself, the decision about where that growth will go.**

4. Comments of the Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer

4.1 There is no direct financial impact arising from the Settlement Hierarchy Assessment itself. Any financial implications associated with subsequent stages of the SDP, including further evidence work, infrastructure requirements or decisions arising from the emerging spatial strategy, would be considered separately through the appropriate budget and governance processes.

5. Comments of the Director of Legal & Governance and Monitoring Officer

5.1 The accompanying report contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of various bodies which is not required to be registered under any or all of the Companies Acts (as defined in section 2 of the Companies Act 2006) or the Friendly Societies Act 1974 or the Friendly Societies Act 1992 or the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014; or the Building Societies Act 1986 or the Charities Act 2011. That information includes details capable of having a material positive and/or detrimental impact or effect on the financial and business positions of the bodies involved which would not otherwise be required to be disclosed and in those and all the other circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweigh the public interest in disclosing it.

6. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

6.1 The Corporate Joint Committee is subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty and the Socio-Economic Duty as defined by the Equality Act 2010.

6.2 The Committee must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to: (1) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited under the Act; (2) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not; and (3) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not.

6.3 The characteristics protected under the Act are:

- age;
- disability;
- gender reassignment;
- marriage and civil partnership;
- pregnancy and maternity;
- race;
- religion or belief;
- sex; and
- sexual orientation.

6.4 Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to:

(a) remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;

(b) take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;

(c) encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

6.5 The socio-economic duty requires public bodies to, when making decisions of a strategic nature about how to exercise its functions, have due regard to the desirability of exercising them in a way that is designed to reduce the inequalities of outcome which result from socio-economic disadvantage.

6.6 There are no specific equalities implications arising from this report.

7. Well-being of Future Generations

7.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 places a duty on public bodies to carry out sustainable development, meaning the process of improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action aimed at achieving the well-being goals of:

- A prosperous Wales
- A resilient Wales
- A healthier Wales
- A more equal Wales
- A Wales of cohesive communities
- A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language.
- A globally responsible Wales

and by acting in a way which seeks to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

7.2 In order to act in accordance with the sustainable development principle, when exercising its functions, the Committee must take account of the following things:

- the importance of balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to meet long term needs;
- the need to take an integrated approach to achieving the well-being goals;
- the importance of involving others with an interest in achieving the well-being goals and of ensuring those persons reflect the diversity of the population of the region;
- how acting in collaboration with others could assist to meet the region's well-being objectives;
- how deploying resources to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may contribute to meeting the region's well-being objectives.

7.3 In developing the Recommendations of this report, regard has been had to the well-being duty arising under the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 ('the Act').

8. Welsh Language Implications

8.1 In accordance with the Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015, consideration has been given to the impact the recommendations made in this report may have on opportunities for people to use and promote the Welsh Language, whether the proposals treat the Welsh Language more or less favourably than the English Language, and opportunities for increasing the positive effects, or decreasing the negative effects, of the proposals on the Welsh Language.

8.2 No negative impacts were identified which would prevent approval being sought to implement the recommendations of this report.

9 Risk Management

9.1 The Regional Settlement Hierarchy Assessment is an important component of the evidence base supporting preparation of the Strategic Development Plan. The principal risks relate to ensuring that the assessment is robust, consistent across the ten Local Authority areas and supported by a clear and auditable evidence trail.

9.2 These risks are being managed through the use of a common regional methodology, structured assessment criteria, cross-authority moderation, and professional planning judgement. The assessment is supported by a substantial suite of technical evidence covering settlement function, accessibility, strategic connectivity, development capacity, and constraints.

9.3 Further quality assurance, regional consistency checking and engagement with officers from the ten Local Authorities will be undertaken before the technical evidence and Regional Settlement Hierarchy are finalised. This will provide an additional opportunity to verify factual information, identify inconsistencies, and ensure that any amendments arising through the process are appropriately evidenced and recorded.

9.4 There is also a risk that the emerging hierarchy could be interpreted as determining the future distribution of development or establishing the growth prospects of individual settlements. The report therefore makes clear that the hierarchy is an evidence input to the SDP Spatial Strategy and does not determine housing requirements, allocate development between Local Authorities, identify individual development sites, or predetermine the eventual Spatial Strategy.

9.5 Subject to the quality assurance, officer engagement and moderation processes described within this report, no additional significant risks have been identified at this stage.

10 Links to Corporate Joint Committee Priorities

10.1 The Regional Settlement Hierarchy Assessment supports the delivery of Cardiff Capital Region's wider strategic priorities by providing a common spatial understanding of how places across the region function, how they are connected and the different and complementary roles they perform.

10.2 In particular, the assessment supports the outcomes identified within CCR's Regional Economic and Industrial Plan 2023–2028:

10.3 **COMPETITIVE** – by identifying the relationship between settlements, strategic employment locations, economic functions, and regional connectivity, helping

to provide a spatial framework within which future economic growth, regeneration and investment can be considered.

10.4 **CONNECTED** – by recognising the importance of sustainable accessibility, strategic public transport, active travel, and wider transport relationships in shaping the regional settlement network. The assessment also supports closer integration between the SDP and Regional Transport Plan so that future spatial and transport priorities can be developed together.

10.5 **RESILIENT** – by recognising the polycentric nature of the region and the complementary roles performed by cities, Regional Hubs, Key Service Centres, smaller settlements, and rural communities. This provides a basis for considering how future growth, regeneration, infrastructure, and investment can support more balanced and sustainable development and help address spatial disparities across the region.

10.6 More broadly, the assessment supports an increasingly integrated approach to the CJC's regional functions by providing a shared spatial evidence base capable of informing the relationship between strategic development planning, regional transport planning, and economic development.

11 Staffing/Workforce Implications

11.1 There are no additional staffing or workforce implications arising directly from the recommendations of this report.

11.2 Preparation, quality assurance, moderation, and finalisation of the Regional Settlement Hierarchy Assessment will continue to be undertaken through the Strategic Development Plan programme using the existing Strategic Development team and commissioned technical support where appropriate.

11.3 The ongoing resource requirements associated with preparation of the Regional Settlement Hierarchy form part of the wider staffing and programme requirements for preparation of the Strategic Development Plan and will continue to be managed through the established SDP programme arrangements.

12 Any Other Implications

12.1 N/A

13 Consultation

13.1 N/A

14 Timetable for Implementation

14.1 N/A

15 Appendices

15.1 None

16 Background Information

16.1 None.

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Date of Meeting: 23 September 2026

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