

## **JOINT SCRUTINY PANEL OF SOMERSET RIVERS AUTHORITY**

Minutes of a Meeting of the Joint Scrutiny Panel of Somerset Rivers Authority held virtually on **Friday 2 July 2021 at 10.00 am**

**Present:** Cllr S Coles (Chair Somerset West & Taunton), Cllr J Cousins (Mendip), Cllr J Nash (Mendip), Cllr Smedley (Sedgemoor), Cllr A Betty (Sedgemoor), Cllr A Groskop (Somerset CC), Cllr John Hunt (Somerset CC), Cllr L Lisgo (Somerset West & Taunton), Cllr R Pailthorpe (South Somerset) and Cllr P Maxwell (South Somerset) D Vigar (Parrett Internal Drainage Board)

**Other Members present:** Cllr M Caswell, Cllr D Hall, Cllr T Munt and Cllr R Williams – Somerset CC

**Apologies for absence:** W Welland (Axe Brue Internal Drainage Board)

### **1 Membership update and Terms of Reference of the Panel - Agenda Item 1**

The Chair welcomed the following new Scrutiny Panel members to their first meeting – Cllr Jon Cousins (Mendip Council), Cllr Janine Nash (Mendip Council) and Cllr Robin Pailthorpe (South Somerset Council).

The current terms of reference of the Panel were NOTED.

### **2 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 3**

The following declarations of interest were made at the meeting: -

- (a) Cllr A Betty – Sedgemoor DC representative – personal interest – member of the Parrett Internal Drainage Board.
- (b) Cllr J Cousins – Mendip Council representative – personal interest – member of Axe Brue Internal Drainage Board; Glastonbury Town Council.
- (c) Cllr T Munt – Somerset County Councillor – in attendance – personal interest – member of 'Reimagining The Levels'.

### **3 Appointment of Vice Chair for 2021 - Agenda Item 4**

The Panel resolved that, subject to clarification from the Monitoring Officer, Mendip Council regarding membership on the Panel and the Axe and Brue Internal Drainage Board, the appointment of Cllr Jon Cousins as Vice Chair of the Panel for 2021 be AGREED.

### **4 Minutes of the meeting held on Friday, 12 February 2021 - Agenda Item 5**

The minutes of the meeting held on Friday, 12 February 2021 were confirmed as a correct record.

5 **Public Question Time** - Agenda Item 6

There were no public questions.

6 **Draft SRA Annual Report** - Agenda Item 7

The Panel received a report and PowerPoint presentation from Jonathan Hudston, Communications Manager, SRA, which invited the Panel to review and comment on the draft 2020-21 Annual Report. The Panel noted that because some end-of-year financial information has only very recently been finalised, the financial section in the report has not yet been completed. Details on the financial performance during the 2020-21 financial year are contained within the 2020-21 Finance Report detailed elsewhere on the agenda for the meeting.

The following questions / comments were made: -

- The Chair welcomed the good report and for information provided on the diverse work undertaken across the county, especially in current pandemic restrictions;
- Natural Flood Management - 6 Triple C schemes across Somerset, and at Montacute – Mr Hudston said that he would be happy to arrange for the Panel to visit at a later stage;
- Noted that of £13.049m awarded in 2014, 91% spent, rest to go on River Sowy and King's Sedgemoor Drain Enhancements Scheme and that the latest phase is due to begin at Cossington Way later in the day;
- Cllr Smedley asked a question about the impact of the Bridgwater Tidal Barrier on navigation of the River Parrett. David Mitchell Senior Manager, SRA advised that he would contact the Environment Agency for a response. The Chair asked that responses to queries raised at the meeting are shared to all Panel members attending the meeting;
- Cllr Munt asked about the trees for water schemes and the management of the trees going forward – David Mitchell referred to the terms and conditions attached to a grant whereby there is a commitment for the grant recipients to maintain them for 25 years. He also agreed to provide further information to the Panel about access to locations;
- Cllr Hunt asked questions about the funding of the Selworthy Scheme – David Mitchell advised that the scheme comes under the National Trust Riverlands Work and the SRA is providing match funding, along with the National Trust and the Environment Agency and that the scheme is being led by the National Trust;
- With regard to urban water management, Cllr Hunt asked about the tree pits installed at Coal Orchard riverside redevelopment site in Taunton and that he would find it helpful to visit the site;
- Noted that the SRA funds a small number of grants for equipment and training given to communities by Somerset Prepared and that one grant

was given in 2020-21 - mention made about how best can promote the community grants scheme.

The Panel: -

1. NOTED the draft Annual Report which outlined the achievements of the SRA and its partners in 2020-21.
2. AGREED that any further thoughts and comments on the format / progress / achievements to David Mitchell as soon as possible to help inform future reports.
3. AGREED that the PowerPoint presentation be circulated to the Panel following the meeting.

**7 Update on work of the SRA Board since last meeting of the Scrutiny Panel**  
- Agenda Item 8

The Panel considered a report from David Mitchell, Senior Manager, SRA, which provided an update on key actions of the SRA Board since the Scrutiny Panel's last meeting in February 2021. The SRA Board had held one meeting since the last Scrutiny Panel meeting.

The Panel NOTED: -

1. The key actions of the SRA Board since the last meeting of the Scrutiny Panel.
2. That the confidential 2020-21 Enhanced Programme List with costs had been circulated to the Scrutiny Panel.

**8 Flood Action Plan Review** - Agenda Item 9

The Panel considered a report from David Mitchell, Senior Manager, SRA, which provided an update on progress on delivery of actions within the current 20 Year Flood Action Plan and asked for views on the proposed approach to preparing, and scope of, a new Flood Action Plan.

Mr Mitchell highlighted that the SRA Grant Guidelines were updated in March 2021 - addressing the impacts of climate change was added as a criteria which bids to the SRA will be assessed against. Work on preparing a new plan is expected to start by the end of July and consultancy support is being commissioned to aid in the preparation of the plan and the target date for completion of a new plan is April 2022.

In response to a query in the report, Mr Mitchell said he would provide clarification on the objectives / workstreams of the current plan.

The Panel NOTED: -

1. The significant progress made on delivery of actions within the current Flood Action Plan.
2. The proposed approach to preparing, and scope of, the new Flood Action Plan and that a draft version of the plan will be brought to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Panel.

## 9 **Key project updates** - Agenda Item 10

The Panel received a PowerPoint presentation from John Rowlands, SRA, which updated the Panel about the River Sowy / King's Sedgemoor Drain enhancements scheme and the Phase 1 channel works.

In the presentation, Mr Rowlands highlighted: -

- key piece of infrastructure – to west of Bridgwater, and the scheme benefits
- outlined works which have been completed
- outlined the key organisations and suppliers involved
- key constraints, requiring mitigation method statements
- all enhancement works will be carried out on Environment Agency land
- outlined mitigation action plan
- forecast project timeline and that the 'on the ground' work will start on 2 July (vegetation clearance)
- the environmental statement and appendices are open for [consultation for 1 month from 3 July](#).
- That some works still to be programmed
- The LEP funding agreement allocation for the scheme will be spent by end of 2022 financial year.

Cllr Betty thanked the SRA for their consultation with the local public and said that he had been very impressed.

The Scrutiny Panel NOTED the information and thanked Mr Rowlands for the detailed presentation. A copy of the PowerPoint presentation will be circulated following the meeting.

## 10 **Annual Finance Report** - Agenda Item 11

The Panel considered a report from Ian Tier, Finance Manager, SRA, which provided information on the financial position at the end of quarter four of 2020 – 21. With regard to information provided in Table A – local partner funding 2020-21 summary, David Mitchell, Senior Manager, SRA, advised that, as detailed in key project update earlier in the meeting, that the SRA Board, held on March 2021, had approved moving £1m from contingency to the Sowy/KSD project. With regard to information provided in Table B - Growth Deal funding Mr Mitchell highlighted that the underspend on Pioneer

Dredging, which was completed in February 2021, has now been reallocated to the Sowy/KSD enhancement scheme.

The Panel NOTED: -

1. The financial performance as at the end of Quarter Four 2020-21.
2. The 2020-21 detailed commercially sensitive update had been circulated separately to the Panel.

11 **SRA precepting legislation update** - Agenda Item 12

The Panel received an update from David Mitchell, Senior Manager, SRA, who outlined the situation with regard to the precept for the SRA.

David Mitchell referred to sections in the draft Annual Report discussed earlier at the meeting and that the SRA is an Unincorporated Association, hosted by Somerset County Council and has no independent legal status. The SRA continues to maintain its dialogue with Defra – that the SRA needs to have legal standing and certainty this will bring – and whilst the Minister is supportive, she has advised that there is currently no Parliamentary time available to consider how will move forward the precepting legislation.

The Chair supported the work by the SRA Board, pushing for the SRA to become a precepting body.

The Panel NOTED the update.

12 **Any other urgent items of business** - Agenda Item 13

Jonathan Hudston, Communications Manager, SRA, said that he is keen to take the Scrutiny Panel members to visit sites and will be in contact with members shortly, asking which sites they would find most beneficial / rewarding and interesting.

There were no other items of business raised.

13 **Proposed Meeting Dates for 2022** - Agenda Item 14

The Panel AGREED the following meeting dates: -

- Friday 28 January 2022 10.00 – 13.00
- Friday 8<sup>th</sup> July 2022 10.00 – 13.00

The meetings will continue to take place virtually, via MS Teams.

**(The meeting ended at 12.05 pm)**  
**CHAIR**