

Somerset Rivers Authority Joint Scrutiny Panel

Update on SRA Community Resilience Activities

RECOMMENDATION

The SRA Joint Scrutiny Panel is asked to:

1. Note and comment on progress on delivery of Workstream 5 (Community Resilience) activities.

1 Purpose of the item:

This paper updates the Panel on the recent work and future plans of the SRA Community Engagement Team.

2 Background and Context

In autumn 2019, Emma Giffard, Community Engagement Officer, and Dawn James, Community Engagement Support Officer, were employed in order to progress the SRA's Workstream 5 (WS5) objectives. It was recognised that with a number of years having passed since the floods in 2013/4, the team would not just focus on the Somerset Levels and Moors, but would look at increasing resilience to flooding across the whole county.

The Community Engagement Team is managed by Nicola Dawson, WS5 lead and Manager of the Somerset Local Authorities' Civil Contingencies Unit. As well as supporting communities, the team also supports partners with delivery of other SRA funded projects. They liaise closely with the Environment Agency engagement team and the SCC Flood and Water Management team, and are involved with the work of the Somerset Prepared partnership, playing a fundamental role in the promotion of the community grant scheme and running of annual events.

3 Highlights of work undertaken by the Community Engagement Team in 2020 & 2021

Before the pandemic, Dawn and Emma were focussed on building relationships with communities across the county. They undertook a series of visits to Parish and Town Council meetings to introduce themselves and offer support.

In Langport, the team supported the development of a community flood group, running a successful and well attended recruitment event just before covid restrictions came in.

The team also supported the partnership project Co-Adapt, a project working with communities to look at climate change and adaptation on the Somerset Levels and Moors.

Working alongside project officers from Somerset Wildlife Trust and Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group South West (FWAG), they delivered two very successful public events, attended by hundreds of people in Langport and Wedmore, as well as a series of workshops on climate adaptation.

When the pandemic arrived, the team had to rethink their engagement strategies. Both staff were redeployed on Covid response (with staff costs funded by SCC), with Dawn supporting the pop-up care home for several months. Emma supported Somerset Waste Partnership for a number of weeks, and later joined the Contact Tracing team as a part-time redeployment alongside her SRA work.

The focus turned to adapting ways of working in order to continue effective engagement in the midst of the pandemic. The team created a series of videos for an online event held under the Somerset Prepared banner in October 2020. In October 2021, this event was once again held online, with live presentations as well as video content. The team also worked on developing a mobile app called 'Somerset Trails' with Co-Adapt, which uses a walking trail to deliver content about flooding and water management. This is available for free on the Google Play and App store and the team continues to develop further trails in other areas of the county, as well as with partners such as the National Trust's Holnicote Estate.

Following the flooding in Chard in June and North Petherton in July 2021, the team supported the Flood and Water Management Team to gather information about the events and to reach out to communities to offer support. The team are not involved with emergency response, but aim to support communities to be better prepared should flooding happen again. In November 2021, following further flooding in South Somerset, Emma and Dawn once again supported the FWM team to field enquires and offer support to flooded residents. This has helped to develop relationships with those communities and has been crucial in developing plans for community flood group networks going forward.

4 Current and future plans

The development of community flood group networks has long been an ambition of the SRA. In West Somerset, a well developed flood group network exists that enables parishes to work together through regular meetings, and facilitates effective communication between communities and authorities. Networks in other areas of the county could resemble this, but as a grassroots initiative they would take on the characteristics that best suit local needs.

However, many communities have historically not seen flooding as a priority concern, and in some areas there has not been local capacity to create community resilience groups or develop relationships with neighbouring communities. Recent flooding events, as well as increased awareness of the risks of climate change, has focussed people's minds and there is now more appetite in the wider community for flood group networks.

The community engagement team are working with or in discussion with the following communities to support the development of local resilience arrangements, as well as nurturing networks where there is an appetite:

- Shepton Mallet cluster – including Shepton Mallet, Croscombe, Darshill, Bowlish, Lamyatt
- Chard cluster – including Chard, Chaffcombe, Coombe St Nicholas, Forton & Tatworth
- Ilminster
- North Petherton
- Langport
- Martock
- Ruishton & Ham
- Roadwater & Monksilver (part of West Somerset Flood Group)
- Rode & Beckington (working in partnership with Mendip DC)
- Burrowbridge, Moorland & Chadmead (working in partnership with the Environment Agency)

Many of these groups are new, and the community engagement team are providing resources such as training and literature, helping organise meetings and speakers, and helping recruit volunteers. Other groups, such as Martock, have well established flood groups, or have flooding as a long-standing concern of the parish council, and Dawn and Emma support these communities as needed.

The community engagement team have also looked at ways of widening interest in flooding and emergency preparedness. With this in mind, they have developed a project with Somerset Film, who have produced a short documentary featuring flood groups across the county. This will be screened at 10 locations in Somerset alongside a selection of archive films related to community resilience in February and March (see appendix). This is intended to inspire new groups and strengthen local resilience arrangements. The development of Local Community Networks as part of the unitary changes may also help develop relationships between neighbouring towns and parishes.

The team have also made plans to engage with schools and businesses, and in November 2020 visited primary schools in Bridgwater and Catcott. Further school visits are planned when Covid rules permit, beginning with Beckington, Rode and Norton St Philip, and

Croscombe schools. Business engagement has been challenging with focus on Covid recovery, but the team are developing plans for engagement later in 2022.

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Date: 17 January, 2022

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Appendix

Free Film Events About Flooding to Celebrate Somerset Community Resilience

A new Somerset film called *Down by the River* premieres in February, with ten free screenings countywide.

Each event will also include an entertaining and thought-provoking selection of Somerset archive films.

Down by the River is a documentary about the inspiring ways that communities across Somerset have responded to flooding, celebrating the extraordinary work of local volunteers. It was commissioned by Somerset Rivers Authority from Bridgwater-based charity Somerset Film.

Archive films include historic Somerset floods, local groups like the Home Guard in World War Two, and fundraising carnivals. The exact mix will vary from place to place, but all the films show what Somerset people can do when they put their minds to it, and illustrate how valuable past experiences can be in responding to challenges such as climate change.

Each event will last about two hours, with free tea and cake.
The screening schedule is:

Glastonbury Town Hall, 4 February, 7pm
Cheddar Village Hall, 12 February, 7pm
Martock Parish Hall, 19 February, 7pm
Shepton Mallet Whitstone School, 2 March 7pm
Minehead Regal Theatre, 5 March, 2pm
Taunton Creative Innovation Centre CIC, 9 March, 7pm
Burrowbridge Coronation Hall, 12 March, 7pm
Yeovil Westlands, 16 March, 7pm
Bridgwater Arts Centre, 18 March, 7pm
Roadwater Village Hall, 20 March, 7pm

To reserve your free seat, visit www.somersetfilm.com/get-involved.

The SRA community engagement team would love to hear from anyone who would like to be involved, to look at new resilience groups, recruiting volunteers, or strengthening existing groups. Contact egiffard@somerset.gov.uk for more information.