

JOINT SCRUTINY PANEL OF SOMERSET RIVERS AUTHORITY

Minutes of a Meeting of the Joint Scrutiny Panel of Somerset Rivers Authority held virtually on **Friday 28th February 2022** 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 L Lisgo (Somerset West & Taunton), Cllr R Pailthorpe (South Somerset) and D Vigar (Parrett Internal Drainage Board).

In attendance: Cllr C Paul.

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

The Scrutiny Manager updated the Panel in relation to the membership since the previous meeting. The Committee were asked to endorse the appointment of Councillor Jon Cousins as Vice-Chair.

That the SRA Scrutiny Panel noted the changes in membership and the Terms of Reference of the Scrutiny Panel.

2 Apologies for absence: - Agenda Item 2

Apologies had been received by Councillors Hunt (SWT) and Maxwell (SSDC) and W Welland (Axe Brue Internal Drainage Board)

3 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 3

There were no additional declarations of interest made.

4 Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 2 July 2021 - Agenda Item 4

The minutes of the meeting held on Friday 2nd July 2021 were confirmed as a correct record.

5 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 5

There were no public questions.

6 Draft SRA Annual Report - Agenda Item 6

The Panel received a report and PowerPoint presentation from Neil McWilliams, Service Manager for Area Highways, which invited the Panel to review and comment on the SRA Funded Enhanced Maintenance Programme.

The following questions / comments were made: -

- This was a valued service in the areas of Bruton and Wincanton.
- Where possible enhanced provision was encouraged to allow gully emptying in additional areas where flooding is identified as an increased risk. The Highways Service Manager welcomed contact from Councillors in relation to areas at risk to be included in this schedule where possible.
- Areas that are an issue could be reviewed to ensure at risk areas could be added to the schedule. Regular cleaning and maintenance had a significant impact on the communities.
- Important enhanced gully work continued which was undertaken as a risk based approach is in line with national well managed highways.
- Jetting process can help with gullies and drains but can cause problems with road wear, although there was no immediate risk to properties, works undertaken under an SRA budget needed to be to tackle flood risk, and would need to be reported to the area highways office.
- Maintenance and repair of drainage systems in Ilminster and Chard were questioned.
- The scrutiny panel could be provided detailed responses to anything specific following the meeting, although the Chard and Ilminster work had been managed at other levels following a report to the Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee.

The Panel: -

NOTED:- The Highways Enhanced Maintenance Programme.

7 **Update on SRA Community Resilience Activities** - Agenda Item 7

The Panel considered a report from Emma Gifford, SRA Community Engagement Officer, which provided an update on Community Resilience Activities since the last Scrutiny Panel meeting.

The following questions / comments were made: -

- EU funding for SRA projects and the impact of Brexit was questioned.
- The UK had 3 EU projects that had a Somerset footprint, £2.1 million had been funded for these projects.
- Part of the project outputs was a regional transition roadmap looking at future options to ensure decisions taken now aren't closing off future options.
- This approach was used by London Thames 2100 to plan to protect London for up to 4 metre sea level rise due to climate change

- Having a future conversation around how this could fit into existing plans and the flood action plan.
- Dawn, Caroline and Emma were congratulated for all their hard work undertaken with Langport flood group which filtered down to all outlying communities. It was questioned what Councillors can do to encourage these groups across the whole of Somerset.
- Involvement for members of local communities was important for attendance and ensuring communities feel like they are having their voices heard.
- Proactive enquiries had been received from Parish Councils to ensure there are more established flood groups in communities at risk of flooding. Flood groups play a critical role in raising awareness about vulnerable people who may need help during a flooding event.
- Keeping community members reminded of the at risk and vulnerable groups that need to be best prepared for flood eventualities.
- The Panel were reminded that the town of Taunton is unparished sso may suffer from a lack of representation as there is no town or parish council to work with. Encouraging flood groups in Taunton may need a different approach..
- David Vigar welcomed the presentations being sent out to Parish Councils.

The Panel:-

NOTED: - The progress on delivery of workstream 5 (Community Resilience Activities)

8 **Quarter 2 21-22 Finance Report** - Agenda Item 8

The Panel considered a report from David Mitchell, Senior Manager, SRA, which provided an update on the Quarter 2 21-22 Finance Report.

Mr Mitchell highlighted that the he total available funds at the start of the year were £10,388k. Of this amount £7,446k was carried forward from 2020-21 and £2,942k was raised in the 2021-22 precept.

As at the end of Quarter Two:

- 3% of funds are forecast to be spent on the administration and staffing of the SRA.
- 2% will be spent on SRA core work and development. • 8% is held as contingency.
- 87% is allocated to specific projects and activities within the Enhanced Programme.

The following questions / comments were made: -

- Concerns were expressed in relation to the reported carry over of budgets. It was clarified that those budgets can be carried over into future years.

The Panel NOTED: -

The Financial performance as at the end of quarter two of 2021-22.

9 **2022-23 Enhanced Programme and Budget** - Agenda Item 9

The Panel received a presentation from David Mitchell, which updated the Panel in relation to the Enhanced Programme and Budget.

The following questions / comments were made: -

- The panel were positive to include the contingency to manage increased requests.
- The panel considered the importance to keep momentum on project funding especially around funding timetables and match funding criteria.
- A recent scheme undertaken with Wessex water was praised, other partners needed to ensure routine maintenance so that combined investments are preserved and not lose the benefit of work being done on existing projects and investments.
- The panel encouraged greater contact with landowners and emphasising rights and responsibilities for landowners that have waterways adjacent to or running through their property.
- Requirements of developers, planners and drainage board encouraged so that they were aware of their responsibilities.
- It was acknowledged that this the riparian responsibilities project hadn't worked as well as wanted to, the secondment has now come to an end.
- This had been reported to the Elected member of the drainage board with responsibility in the geographical area to report back to the drainage board.
- Questioning took place in relation to communications with farming communities maintaining hedges between sept and January. DEFRA were due to promote information around this area.
- Mr Mitchell and the SRA team were thanked for all their hard work

The Scrutiny Panel NOTED:-

1. The draft 2022-23 Enhanced Programme proposals and budget.
2. Considered any recommendations they wish to make to the SRA Board in relation to the 2022-23 Enhanced Programme.

3. SRA Scrutiny request that riparian owners are contacted to emphasise their rights and responsibilities in relation to watercourse maintenance to ensure, where appropriate, necessary maintenance is undertaken resulting in reduced flood risk with less call on public funds.

10 **Flood Action Plan Review** - Agenda Item 10

The Panel considered a report from Mr Mitchell, Senior Manager, SRA, which provided information on the update on the progress of the Flood Action Plan Review.

It was reported that work on preparing a new plan was now underway with the consultancy firm WSP awarded the commission to undertake the project. WSP will be managed by the Somerset Rivers Authority team. Regular updates will be given to SRA Management Group and the SRA Board.

An overview of the process was set out with the Timescale of the draft plan published by December 2022, Joint Scrutiny Panel January 2023 and adoption by SRA Board March 2023.

The following questions / comments were made: -

- The Panel were reminded that the action plan remained a living document.
- The Panel thanked Mr Mitchell for the update and welcomed the report for consideration in July.

The Panel NOTED: -

The proposed approach to preparing, and scope of, a new Flood Action Plan.

11 **Any other urgent items of business** - Agenda Item 11

There were no other items of business raised.

12 **Date of next Meeting** - Agenda Item 12

The Panel AGREED the following meeting dates: -

- Friday 8th July 2022 10.00 – 13.00

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

(The meeting ended at 12.10 pm)

CHAIR