

JOINT SCRUTINY PANEL OF SOMERSET RIVERS AUTHORITY

Minutes of a Meeting of the Joint Scrutiny Panel of Somerset Rivers Authority held in the Taunton Library Meeting Room, Paul Street, Taunton, TA1 3XZ, on Friday 31 January 2020 at 10.00 am

Present: Cllr A Groskop, Cllr A Betty, Cllr L Leyshon, Cllr L Lisgo and David Vigar, Simon Coles (Chairman).

Other Members present: Cllr A Wedderkopp

Apologies for absence: Cllr N Cottle, Cllr J Hunt, Cllr Maxwell and Cllr Smedley

1. **Appointment of Chairman** - Agenda Item 1

Councillor Coles was duly appointed as Chairman of the Joint Scrutiny Panel of The Somerset Rivers Authority.

2. **Appointment of Vice-Chairman** - Agenda Item 2

Councillor Hunt was nominated in his absence as the Vice-Chairman of the Joint Scrutiny Panel.

3. **Apologies** – Agenda Item 3

Apologies were received from Councillors Cottle, Hunt, Maxwell and Smedley.

4. **Declaration of Interests** – Agenda Item 4

There were no Declarations of Interest.

5. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on 20 September 2019** - Agenda Item 5

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2019 were confirmed and signed as correct with the inclusion of Councillor A Betty in attendance.

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

There were no public questions.

7. **Key Project Updates** - Agenda Item 7

This paper updated the Panel on the latest progress with some SRA key projects. Key projects regularly reported on to the SRA Board and which were usually of a larger scale and value.

Key projects were reported to the SRA Board by exception. Only when a decision was required, or a project had reached a significant milestone is an update tabled as an agenda item. This report focused on projects which had recently reached significant milestones or were due to progress towards a milestone.

Oath to Burrowbridge

The SRA Board allocated a proportion of its Heart of the SW Local Enterprise Partnership Funding (£1m) towards river dredging between Oath and Burrowbridge on the River Parrett. The work was being delivered by the Parrett Internal Drainage Board.

The original estimate was that the works would take 12 weeks to complete and up to 22,000m³ of material would be removed from within the river channel and deposited at the rear of the bank. In total 21,363m³ of material has been removed in 11 weeks.

Dredging activities started on the right bank on 16 September. The major works were completed on 29 November and the contractors vacated the site on the 4th December.

Bridgwater Tidal Barrier

The SRA Board allocated a proportion of its Heart of the SW Local Enterprise Partnership Funding (£2m) towards accelerating progress with delivering a Bridgwater Tidal Barrier.

The Environment Agency (EA) and Sedgemoor District Council (SDC) are working in Partnership to deliver the Bridgwater Tidal Barrier Scheme by 2024, subject to funding and statutory approvals. The project would reduce tidal flood risk to 11,300 homes and 1,500 businesses. The present value of benefits was £1,331 million. The present value of capital and maintenance costs of the Barrier and downstream banks work was £100 million. The benefit cost ratio was reported at 13.

River Sowy / Kings Sedgemoor Drain

The River Sowy, used by the Environment Agency to take excess water away from the River Parrett near Aller. Providing more capacity in the Sowy-KSD system, so that it could be used more effectively, was a key aim of Somerset's 20 Year Flood Action Plan, which was overseen by Somerset Rivers Authority.

The Board agreed in June 2018 that works to enhance the Sowy/KSD should continue with an incremental approach. Phase 1 works included desilting at Parchey and Dunball bridges (completed November 2018), widening of the lower Sowy using a 'cut and fill' approach and work to structures to allay concern of localised increased water levels on adjacent land. The package included extensive work to mitigate any detrimental impacts affecting the protected environmental habitat areas (Special Protection Areas).

In September 2019 the Board gave the approval to proceed with commissioning the delivery of the environmental mitigation package and the channel works.

Project development for Phase 1 of the channel enhancement scheme was ongoing. Archaeological surveys for Phase 1 were undertaken in November 2019, with no additional significant features of interest being discovered. The first drafts of the initial 'environmental scoping' reports having been discussed with Natural England officers.

Debate

- Heart of the Southwest Funding would need to be spent by 2021
- Bridgwater Tidal Barrier consultation comments would be circulated to the board.
- LEP funded enhancements to the River Sowy / KSD and environmental mitigations are anticipated to be delivered by March 2021
- River Sowy / KSD public events information would be circulated and publicised to members of the Somerset Rivers Authority Scrutiny committee.
- There remained £4.7 million of funds to deliver the phase 1 enhancements along the River Sowy / KSD, £2.8m of which is LEP funding. The projected delivery date for phase 1 remains March 2021.
- In relation to the Bridgwater tidal barrier project
- The order was submitted on 18th December and approved by the Secretary of State. From 13th February there would be a consultation period.
- A decision would be made in relation to the public enquiry by the summer time.
- Consultation comments would be circulated to the board.
- The Somerset Rivers Authority Joint Scrutiny Panel noted the SRA project delivery in 2018/19 and encouraged wider participation from all organisations.

Resolved:- that the Somerset Rivers Authority noted the latest position with key SRA Projects.

8. **Precepting Legislation** - Agenda Item 8

An update was provided around Precepting Legislation

The SRA noted the Precepting Legislation Update.

9 **Quarter 2 - 2019/20 Finance Report** - Agenda Item 9

The report provided information on the financial position at the end of quarter two. It includes a proposal for moving the remaining budget from a number of completed projects to contingency.

Somerset Rivers Authority does not deliver projects, instead the partners that made up the SRA partnership delivered projects on behalf of the SRA and once projects were complete, claimed back the cost of the works.

There were two main sources of funding which the SRA received:

- a. Local Partner Funding – money raised annually by an additional amount on Council Tax and direct contributions from the Internal Drainage Boards
- b. Growth Deal Funding – £13.049m of funding allocated in 2014 through the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (HotSWLEP) for specific large-scale capital projects

The financial position as at the end of 2018-19 financial year was set out detailing the total amount of funds carried forward and available in 2019-20.

Table B summarised the financial position as at the end of quarter two 2019-20 and committed and forecast spend for 2019-20 and future years. Further detail is provided below the table.

During quarters one and two 2019-20 the SRA processed delivery partner claims totalling £844k. Of the total amount paid:

- 59% (£500k) relates to Growth Deal funded actions including delivery of the Sowby/KSD Enhancement Scheme and Pioneer Dredging.
- 29% (£242k) relates to Enhanced Programme works (funded from Local Partners funding)
- 12% (£102k) relates to administration and staffing.

Following approval by the Board to reallocate the funds to contingency, the SRA contingency fund increased by £27k from £129k to £156k.

Debate

- It was explained that due to the lag in partner claims being submitted some of the figures actually relate to work undertaken much earlier in the year. Concerns were expressed over annual billing and the effect that may have on suppliers as well as SRA finance reporting. The Panel was advised that terms of payment were agreed between delivery partners and suppliers but the SRA processed any claims received quickly.
- Local contractors were often used depending on the size of the contract.
- Future years expenditure was requested in separate tabs on future reports for comparison.
- The workstream spend was detailed, the existing contingency was set at £156k.
- The Panel explained that the detailed information on the confidential appendix was very difficult to read online and requested a clearer, simplified version of the information in future.

The Panel noted the finance position as at the end of the 2018/19 financial year.

10 **2020/21 Enhanced Programme and Budget** - Agenda Item 10

2020-21 was the fifth year that the SRA would fund an 'enhanced programme' of projects to provide an extra level of flood protection and resilience for Somerset residents. This extra level of protection was funded by a shadow precept raised by the County and District Councils. The Parrett and Axe Brue Internal Drainage Boards (IDB) also contributed £10,000 each per annum. The final figure would be confirmed in February 2020, but it was estimated the

shadow precept and IDB contribution for financial year 2021-21 would total approximately £2.97m.

The SRA Board provisionally approved the programme at its January meeting but the programme could not formally be approved until all councils confirmed they would raise the SRA 'shadow precept' during their February budget setting meetings.

22 proposals were submitted by SRA Delivery Partners which had a total value of £2.541m. All proposals were scored against how they met the Flood Action Plan aims and objectives. The SRA Technical Group reviewed the list of schemes at their meeting on 4 November 2019.

Following the SRA Technical Group assessment one additional proposal – 'sub-catchment analysis and development of integrated schemes' - was included by the SRA team at a value of £150k. The total cost of scheme proposals for 2020-21 was set at £2.691m.

The total number of schemes submitted, and the total value of the schemes was lower this year than in previous years. This was the first year that the SRA is in a position to fund all the proposals that were submitted.

The lower number of schemes submitted this year was a reflection of the number of SRA funded schemes already in the process of being delivered and the resource required to deliver these. As the SRA matures then the number of projects 'on the shelf' for delivery decreases and additional work will be required to develop new schemes into robust proposals.

SRA projects were categorised into 5 workstreams as set out in the Flood Action Plan.

Workstream	Title	2020-21 proposals £000's
W1a & W1b	Dredging and River Management (a = large scheme, b = small scheme)	£325
W2	Land Management	£410
W3	Urban Water Management	£446
W4	Resilient Infrastructure	£1,075
W5	Building local resilience	£285
-	Multiple workstreams	£150
	Total	£2,691

Debate

- The panel asked under what workstream are riparian rights issues being considered, are they being dealt with effectively and who is responsible for policing this. SRA funds a Riparian Responsibilities offer to help tackle complex situations but this service has not seen as great a take-up as hoped. Work was being undertaken with the Internal Drainage

Board and Landowners. The power to enforce against riparian issues lies with other organisations but the SRA could be taking more of a lead on coordinating tackling the issue.

- It was acknowledged that enforcement officers were stretched so addressing riparian issue is a challenge. It was suggested that more work was needed with estate agents to ensure awareness of riparian responsibilities when property / land purchases are made.
- It discussed if consideration had been given to using the opportunity to comment on the Agriculture Act to raise the question of whether delivering public payment for a public good could extend to ditch and culvert maintenance.
- It was questioned how enhanced highway maintenance schemes were delivered and if the SRA was filling a gap that should be undertaken by Skanska as part of their contract with SCC.
- A concern was raised about a general high demand for some of the highway works and a lack of capacity within the Highway Authority to respond to the demand.
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- Parish and Town Council involvement in flood alleviation was welcomed. Highway work planned to take place in their area are notified to County Councillors in advance. SRA officers agreed to aim for 3 monthly updates on progress with enhanced maintenance highway schemes.
- More efforts would be made to update the Panel on a three month basis.
- The role of the SRA being a statutory consultee in the planning process was considered. As it is not legally established it is not a consultee on planning matters,
- The Panel encouraged the SRA to work closely with the councils as they develop the Climate Emergency Strategy.
- The SRA were encouraged to use data modelling in future as a tool to predict the impact of planning activity and applications as evidence around flood impact assessments.

The SRA Joint Scrutiny Panel noted the 2020-21 Enhanced Programme update

11 **Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Project Spend** - Agenda Item 11

In 2015 the Heart of the South West LEP allocated £13.049m of 'Growth Deal' funding to the 'Somerset Flooding' project. The project was described in the funding agreement as:

Phase 2 of the Somerset Levels and Moors 20 Year Flood Action Plan consisted of a package of measures to reduce the duration, depth and frequency of flooding on the Somerset Levels and Moors. This safeguarded houses, commercial premises, communities and infrastructure on the Somerset Levels and Moors and increase business confidence, contributing to the creation of new jobs and new houses.

The project funding was split across four categories:

Category	Growth Deal £m	Status
Dredging and river management	£2.45	In progress
River Sowey / Kings Sedgemoor Drain enhancements (including Beer Wall and Chedzoy)	£7.984	In progress
Bridgwater Tidal Barrier	£2.0	Spend complete
Land Management	£0.55	Spend complete
Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Improvements	£0.065	Spend complete
Total	£13.049	

LEP funding was provided by central government. Government set a hard deadline for spending of LEP funds of the end of March 2021. LEP funding would be spent by this deadline.

The financial year 2020 – 2021 would be the final year of the LEP funding allocation. The SRA Board and delivery partners were focussed on ensuring that all LEP funding would be used by the set deadline. The SRA Board would be closely monitoring progress over the coming months.

To date £9.24m of the £13.049m of LEP funding had been spent. The remaining £3.8m was primarily allocated to further dredging, River Sowey/ Kings Sedgemoor Drain enhancements and their associated mitigation actions. There were also some other projects in receipt of smaller allocations. The remaining funds were set out:-

Project	Value	Delivery Partner
Further pioneer dredging and mitigation (Oath to Burrowbridge & Northmoor to M5)	£0.7m	Parrett Internal Drainage Board
River Sowey / Kings Sedgemoor Drain enhancements and mitigation (Phase 1 main channel improvements)	£2.8m	Environment Agency
North Drain Pumping Station Improvements	£0.17m	Environment Agency
Field Way, Highbridge (contribution £1.5m surface water flooding scheme)	£0.10m	Wessex Water
Total	£3.77	

Further SRA Project Status were set out:-

- Oath to Burrowbridge – 2.2km of river dredged during October and November with 21,000m³ of material removed and placed at the rear of the river bank. Majority of works complete. Contractor will return when weather improves to undertake reinstatement works.
- Northmoor to M5 – trial dredge using water injection dredging occurring January 2020. Aim is to undertake additional dredging using the WID method during 2020-21.
- River Sowey / KSD – extensive planning and design work undertaken. Consultation with landowners January 2020. Preparing to tender for

delivery of mitigation structures. Channel works taking place during 2020-21.

- North Drain Pumping Station – works planned for summer 2020.
- Field Way – public engagement events January 2020. Work to begin February 2020.

Most projects were either under way or at the final stages of planning and design before implementation. There was a degree of uncertainty associated with the proposed dredging between Northmoor and the M5. This was a result of the need to undertake some trials to confirm the water injection method would be suitable for this section of river.

The largest portion of unspent LEP funds were allocated to the River Sow/ KSD enhancement project. The Environment Agency project team were well advanced in the design and planning for this project with a high level of confidence that the LEP spending deadline would be met.

As the SRA entered the final year of LEP projects, SRA Officers and the Board would be closely monitoring progress to ensure all projects met the LEP deadline.

Debate

- There still remained £3.77 million in funding yet to be spent.
- Works on the River Sow were anticipated to be completed by December.
- Funding was due to be spent by March 31st but there will be a lag period between works being completed and invoices being paid. LEP are aware of this. SRA has advised partners to be ready to expedite payment.
- Claims could be granted in the first quarter after 31st March as long as the works had commenced prior to that date.

The SRA noted the latest position regarding LEP funded projects

12 **Joint Scrutiny Panel Work Programme and Future Training** - Agenda Item 12

The Panel endorsed its proposed work programme and noted that a provisional date for the Summer meeting of 17 July 2020 would be circulated.

Panel members were invited to identify any subjects about which they would like to have information.

13 **Any Other Business of Urgency** - Agenda Item 13

There were no other items of business.

(The meeting ended at 12:15)

CHAIRMAN