

**JOINT SCRUTINY PANEL OF SOMERSET RIVERS AUTHORITY
(PLEASE NOTE – ALL PUBLIC MEETINGS ARE TAKING PLACE
VIRTUALLY UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE).**

Minutes of a Meeting of the Joint Scrutiny Panel of Somerset Rivers Authority held on
Friday 17 July 2020 at 10.00 am

Present: Cllr S Coles (Chair), Cllr A Betty, Cllr A Groskop, Cllr John Hunt (Vice-Chair),
Cllr L Lisgo, Cllr L Leyshon, Cllr B Smedley and D Vigar and W Welland

Other Members present: Cllr D Hall and Cllr T Munt

Apologies for absence: Cllr N Cottle, Cllr P Maxwell and Cllr S Osborne

1 **Apologies** - Agenda Item 1

Apologies were received from Cllr N Cottle, Cllr P Maxwell and Cllr S Osborne.

Cllr Leyshon advised that Cllr N Cottle is no longer able to attend daytime meetings. Jamie Jackson to contact Mendip Council for a replacement representative.

David Vigar and Wendy Welland mentioned that they had not received the minutes or the Agenda Pack. It was also mentioned that there seemed to be a slight issue with the meeting invitations sent out via Teams for District Council representatives. Jamie Jackson agreed to investigate.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest made at the meeting.

3 **Minutes from the previous meeting held on 31 January 2020** - Agenda Item 3

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2020 were confirmed as correct record.

4 **Public Question Time** - Agenda Item 4

There were no questions from members of the public.

5 **Terms of Reference** - Agenda Item 5

The Panel noted the change in membership with D Tratt being replaced by W Welland.

Jamie Jackson reminded the Panel that the Quorum for the meeting is 6 representatives, which includes 4 from the Partnership.

6 **Dredging Benefits Report.** - Agenda Item 6

Rob Kidson gave a detailed presentation to the Panel which provided an update on the benefits of water injection dredging (WID) methods and covered the following matters: -

- Early experiences 2014 onwards
- SRA commissioned dredging strategy – to find more cost-effective methods of dredging
- 2016 maintenance trials – trying Hydrodynamic dredging method – no removal of sediment from channel to bankside
- Outlined the dredging trials equipment – cutter suction / water injection and merits of them
- Explained water injection process and control, where the silt goes, monitoring and ‘when it could come back’
- The characteristics of WID and when best to do this, and
- outlined the next steps – repeat maintenance dredging – awaiting new survey data to see where silt has returned and seeking to carryout first time dredging work on Northmoor to M5 reach.

It was noted that the Northmoor to M5 work is not covered by the existing environmental protocol agreed with the Environment Agency. A further assessment is required to check whether a full environmental impact assessment is required before work can begin.

The Panel thanked Mr Kidson for the informative presentation and noted that in order for SRA funding to continue if Somerset becomes a single Unitary Authority, SRA will need to become a separate body.

7 **SRA Scrutiny End of Year Report** - Agenda Item 7

The draft 2019-2020 Annual Report was shared with the SRA Joint Scrutiny Panel which provided detailed information on what activities have been funded by the SRA and delivered by SRA partners over the course of the year.

It was noted that the primary purpose of the July Scrutiny Panel meeting is to review activity over the previous twelve months. The Panel was invited to review the draft annual report in advance of the meeting and take the opportunity to raise any questions or queries with officers at the meeting.

The following comments were made: -

- The 2019 elections have made the SRA slightly smaller in membership as West Somerset and Taunton Deane merged to become one council.
- SRA and EU funding is currently supporting the work being done on the Somerset Levels, to gain greater resilience to Climate and economic change, and this needs to continue at District level. Should we move to a Unitary Authority, the work will need to continue.
- Comment made that the Bleadon Sluice, which sits on the boundary between Somerset and North Somerset, has not worked properly for several years. David Mitchell advised that the issue has been raised previously with the Environment Agency and agreed to raise it again.

Agreed: -

1. To note the draft Annual Report which outlined the achievements of the SRA and its partners over the course of 2019-20.
2. That the Panel review the annual report and provide thoughts and comments on the format / progress / achievements to David Mitchell as soon as possible to help inform future reports.

8 **Highways Scheme Assessments** - Agenda Item 8

Neil McWilliams gave a presentation to the Panel on SRA Works and provided information on the following:

- gully emptying
- future work programme including silk trap emptying
- Creation of new drainage assets and infrastructure to improve flood resilience and/or reduce the impact of flooding events
- Capital schemes
- Scheme details on the Stogursey and Shurton Flood Relief Scheme.
- SRA profile and reporting – communications, public awareness and also financial reporting matters.

During the discussion Cllr Hunt asked for a direct contact number for blocked drains and who cleans the Galmington stream – Neil McWilliams agreed to take this back for action. He also advised that a map will be shared showing the Gully cleansing sites which he will forward to be circulated.

The Panel thanked Mr McWilliams for the helpful updates and agreed that the update be noted.

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

The Panel received a report from David Mitchell, Somerset Rivers Authority, which provided an update on the latest position with regard to some key

projects. The Panel noted that key projects are projects regularly reported on to the SRA Board and which are usually of a larger scale and value and the report provided an overview of project progress, significant changes or risks that have occurred since the previous Scrutiny Panel meeting on 31st January 2020, covering the following matters:-

Oath to Barrowbridge Dredging – it was noted that work continues to monitor the effects of the dredge to determine whether any further environmental mitigations are required.

Bridgwater Tidal Barrier – it was noted that the decision on the Transport and Works Order (TWAO) is ultimately taken by the Secretary of State following consideration of any representations made. A list of the problems encountered will be shared outside of this meeting. An estimate of current project timeline is:

Assumed date for TWAO decision	Late 2020 (Excludes Covid-19 impact)
Complete Tender and FBC approval	Late 2021
Main contracts	2022-2025
Barrier should be operational	Late 2024

Sowey/King's Sedgemoor Drain (KSD) Enhancement Scheme – noted that the project is working to a very tight timeline. Delivering projects in and around the highly designated environmental sites of the Somerset Levels and Moors is extremely challenging. The project team and SRA partners are working hard to ensure the project is delivered.

Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviations Improvements Scheme (TSFAIS)

At the end of January 2020, the SRA Board confirmed its ongoing support for TSFAIS and its wider objectives, subject to the condition that any interventions made as part of the Scheme must have no significant impact downstream of Taunton.

In February 2020, a Full Council meeting of Somerset West and Taunton agreed to prioritise three initial local interventions. These are:

1. Optimising flood water storage at Longrun Meadow through building 1500 metres of raised embankments up to 1.8 metres high. This will benefit 687 properties.
2. Raising low spots in the River Tone's flood defences from Frieze Hill to Town Bridge. This will benefit 508 homes, businesses and facilities such as the police station and council offices, BT exchange and French Weir surgery, plus the A3027 and A3088.
3. Raising Firepool Lock gates to prevent River Tone floodwater entering the Bridgwater and Taunton Canal at Firepool, which reduces the risks of

overtopping into Maiden's Brook and then Allen's Brook in Bathpool, and also raising 750metres of River Tone defences between Firepool Lock and the A358 Obridge Viaduct. This will benefit 219 properties.

Somerset West and Taunton Council has £6m put aside for building projects 1 and 2. Further funding for project 3, and other TSFAIS elements, is being sought. In March 2020, as part of the SRA's budget and Enhanced Programme of works for 2020-21, the SRA Board agreed to put £300,000 towards the detailed design and delivery of the three interventions listed above.

The Panel was advised that additional information on the matters reported are also contained in the draft Annual Report.

Agreed: -

That the latest position with key SRA projects be noted.

10 **Quarter 4 Finance Report** - Agenda Item 10

The Panel considered the Qtr 4 Finance Report which provided information on the financial position at the end of financial year 2019-20.

It was noted that this report, together with the associated document, deliver the financial reporting requirements consistent with the Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Constitution and Local Memorandum of Understanding. Somerset Rivers Authority does not deliver projects, instead the partners that make up the SRA partnership deliver projects on behalf of the SRA and once projects are complete, claim back the cost of the works.

Agreed: -

That the financial performance of the SRA for financial year 2019 – 2020 be noted.

Note:

The 2019-20 detailed commercially sensitive update has been circulated to the Panel.

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

No items were raised.

(The meeting ended at 12.53 pm)

CHAIR