

Somerset Rivers Authority Joint Scrutiny Panel Paper

SRA Joint Scrutiny Panel Terms of Reference

Introduction

1. The Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) was launched on 31 January 2015 to play a key role in flood protection for the county. It is run by a Board of partners including the Environment Agency, Natural England, the Somerset Internal Drainage Boards, the Lead Local Flood and Highway Authority (Somerset County Council) and the other Somerset Local Authorities in their roles as Flood Risk Management Authorities.
2. The SRA Board is to provide a strategic overview of the continued delivery of the Somerset Flood Action Plan; Flood Risk and Water Level Management in Somerset; and to provide a public forum and single point of contact for collective decision-making in respect of Flood Risk and Water Level Management in Somerset.
3. The SRA Board also has responsibility for identifying, prioritising, sourcing funding and overseeing the delivery of additional flood risk and water level management work across the whole of Somerset.
4. At its 23 March 2016 Board meeting, the SRA Board agreed to the establishment of a Joint Scrutiny Panel (similar to the Joint Waste Scrutiny model), which would meet twice a year, at the most critical and important times. This would ensure that officer attendance at Scrutiny Committees would be minimised, whilst providing all relevant partners with the opportunity to scrutinise the work of the SRA Board.

Role of the Joint Scrutiny Panel

5. To examine the activities of the SRA and provide assurance to the SRA's constituent councils and partners that it is operating effectively.
6. To encourage wider involvement in the work of the Somerset Rivers Authority.

Membership

The Joint Scrutiny Panel shall consist of two non-executive elected members from each of the five Somerset councils and one from each Internal Drainage Board, totalling 12 Panel members.

It is a matter for each Local Authority and the Internal Drainage Boards to nominate or terminate the appointment of members serving on the Panel. The length of appointment is a matter for each partner represented on the body.

Meetings

The Joint Scrutiny Panel will meet twice a year for the business stated. Additional meetings will be arranged as required.

The date and time of each meeting will be agreed by the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Panel, in conjunction with the support officer.

The host authority will be responsible for issuing the papers and producing the meeting notes to all attendees. This will be done electronically. The Panel member and/or the Local Authority or Internal Drainage Board they represent will be responsible for any additional costs or services, including:

- Any printing or stationery requirements
- Any travel and subsistence expenses incurred i.e. car parking costs, fuel
- Any equipment required for site visits, i.e., appropriate footwear, hard hat, etc

Quorum

The quorum for the Joint Scrutiny Panel shall be 6 representatives, with a minimum of 1 representative from 4 separate partners.

Election of Chair

The Joint Scrutiny Panel shall elect a Chair and Vice-Chair annually.

Agenda Items

The Scrutiny Panel Chair and Vice-Chair shall agree each meeting agenda in consultation with the support officer and liaison with the Senior Manager of the Somerset Rivers Authority.

Agenda Items for the next meeting shall be a standing item on the Panel's agenda.

Voting

It is intended that agreement will be reached by consensus, however if a vote is required each Panel Member will have one vote. In the event of a tie the Chair shall have the casting vote.

Members' Conduct

Members of Local Authorities and Internal Drainage Boards on the Joint Scrutiny Panel will be bound by their own Codes of Conduct. All Panel Members will need to comply with the principles of the Host Authority's Members' code of conduct as it applies to the declaration of interests, and compliance with the principles of public life set out by the Nolan Committee on Standards in Public Life.

Panel members are encouraged to participate fully in meetings, but must be aware of the limitations in capacity of officers to respond to detailed, individual queries between meetings.

Declarations of Interest

Members of the Joint Scrutiny Panel must declare any interest during meetings of the Panel (and withdraw from the meeting if necessary) in accordance with their Council's Code of Conduct or as required by law.

Openness and Transparency

All meetings of the Joint Scrutiny Panel will be open to the public unless it is necessary to exclude the public in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

Confidentiality

In accordance with their Council's Code of Conduct, elected Members of the Joint Scrutiny Panel must not disclose any information considered 'exempt' in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

Host Authority

The Joint Scrutiny Panel will be hosted under Local Government arrangements by Somerset County Council and supported by officers from the County Council's Democratic Services team.

Review of Terms of Reference - The Joint Scrutiny Panel will review its Terms of Reference on an annual basis.

The Terms of Reference were last reviewed and approved at the meeting held on 20 September 2019.

