

Public Agenda Pack



EXECUTIVE

Wednesday, 26 February 2025

10.00 am

Luttrell Room - County Hall, Taunton TA1 4DY

SUPPLEMENT TO THE AGENDA

To: The members of the Executive

We are now able to enclose the following information which was unavailable when the agenda was published:

Agenda Item 12 Executive Decision to confirm Somerset Council as Host Authority and Accountable Body to the Somerset Rivers Authority partnership.
(Pages 3 - 66)

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Decision Report

Committee: Executive

Meeting or Proposed Decision Date –
26/02/2025

Key Decision – yes



Executive Decision in relation to Somerset Council's role as Host Authority and Accountable Body to the Somerset Rivers Authority partnership.

Chair of Committee: Cllr Bill Revans

Executive Member(s): Cllr Graham Oakes Lead Member for Public Health, Climate Change and Environment

Local Member(s) and Division(s) affected: All members and divisions affected

Executive Director: Chris Hall, Executive Director for Economic Development Skills and Climate

Executive Summary

This decision is to approve Somerset Council continuing as Host Authority and Accountable Body for the Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) partnership. The decision also approves the passing on of funds raised through council tax for the purposes of the SRA.

The SRA, established in 2015 following the devastating floods of 2013/14, is a partnership organisation hosted by Somerset Council¹. Its purpose is to reduce the risks and impacts of flooding across Somerset by enabling its partner organisations to do extra work based on local priorities.

The partnership includes Somerset Council, the Environment Agency, the Axe Brue Internal Drainage Board, the Parrett Internal Drainage Board, Wessex Regional Flood and Coastal Committee, Natural England and Wessex Water.

The SRA is a unique partnership in that it is funded directly by Somerset residents through a small additional charge per household on council tax. This charge was established in 2016/17 explicitly to fund the activities of the SRA. In 2025-26 this will amount to £3.113m.

By agreeing to be the Host Authority and Accountable Body for the SRA Somerset Council is enabling the partnership to continue funding extra activities across the county.

The SRA operates under a governance framework set up by Somerset County Council and is overseen by a Board that includes 6 Somerset Council Councillors. The Board is Chaired by Cllr Mike Stanton. All SRA decisions must, where

¹ Somerset County Council before 1 April 2023

necessary, also follow Somerset Council decision making processes to conform with the Accountable Body Standing Orders and Financial Regulations.

Recommendations

The Executive agrees:

- a. To Somerset Council continuing in the role of Host Authority and Accountable Body for the Somerset Rivers Authority for financial year 2025/26.
- b. To review the revised 2025-26 Local Memorandum of Understanding and Constitution set out in Appendix 1 and authorise the Lead Member for Public Health, Climate Change and Environment to sign this on behalf of Somerset Council.
- c. To review the proposed SRA Budget and SRA Enhanced Programme for 2025-26, (Appendix 2) in accordance with the recommendations to be considered by the SRA Board at its meeting on 7th March 2025.
- d. Subject to Full Council confirming the raising of the SRA's 2025-26 shadow precept on 5 March 2025, to the release of funding committed from all sources in 2025-26 for the purposes of the SRA as set out in Appendix 2.
- e. That the detailed management of the 2025-26 SRA Budget and Enhanced Programme within the control total allocated to the SRA is undertaken in accordance with the constitutional, financial regulations and decision-making arrangements of Somerset Council as Accountable Body.

Reasons for Proposals

The recommendations, once approved, will confirm Somerset Council will continue as the accountable legal body for the Somerset Rivers Authority. This will enable the SRA partnership to continue to deliver projects that provide an extra level of flood protection, mitigation and resilience across Somerset.

The funding raised will be used to fund an Enhanced Programme of activities to reduce the risk and impacts of flooding with the remainder covering SRA staff costs and overheads and contingency funds.

The Local Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and Constitution which sets the context for the work of the SRA has been revised to reflect changes relevant to the 2025-26 financial year. The MoU has been revised to reflect that the SRA Board will be responsible for oversight of a new Community Flood Action Fund through 2025-26.

The MoU must be formally agreed by all Partners to ensure the ongoing support of those Partners in delivering the SRA Enhanced Programme of work and to provide a clear governance structure for setting and overseeing that work. SRA funds are not

disbursed until the MoU has been signed by all parties. The MoU will be signed on behalf of Somerset Council by the Lead Member for Public health, Climate Change and Environment.

Report Author: David Mitchell, Somerset Rivers Authority Manager
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Background and purpose of report

1. Somerset Council took on the role of Host Authority and Accountable Body for the Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) in 2023, carrying on the role that Somerset County Council had performed since 2015. Once approved, this decision will ensure that the residents of Somerset continue to benefit from extra funding and extra actions that reduce the risk and impacts of flooding across the county.
2. Winter 2013-14 was the wettest in Somerset for 250 years. Around 150km² of land was submerged for weeks, 165 homes flooded, 7,000 businesses affected, 81 roads closed. An Economic Impact Study estimated the cost to Somerset as being up to £147.5m. The SRA was launched in January 2015 to provide an extra level of flood protection and resilience for Somerset. Through the SRA an additional £29m has already been raised locally to tackle flooding across the county. Approximately 250 schemes and activities have been funded.
3. The SRA is a partnership of Somerset Council, the Environment Agency, the Axe Brue Internal Drainage Board, the Parrett Internal Drainage Board, Wessex Regional Flood and Coastal Committee, Natural England and Wessex Water. Somerset is unique in having the SRA and the ability to raise funds in the way it does.
4. A key decision is taken each year by the Host Authority to approve the allocation of the funds, raised through an Alternative Notional Amount on Council Tax and contributions from Somerset Internal Drainage Boards, for use in the coming financial year by the SRA. For 2025-26 the charge per band D property will be £14.65. This is no increase from previous years and is to be confirmed at 5 March Full Council Budget setting meeting. This results in approximately £3.113m being raised from council tax. The Axe Brue and Parrett Internal Drainage Boards also contribute £10,000 each.
5. The Alternative Notional Amount (ANA) is the formal name for the process used by central government to allow Somerset councils to make a small increase to council tax charges in the 2016-17 financial year solely for the purpose of funding the activities of the Somerset Rivers Authority. This mechanism ensured that funding the SRA did not reduce funding for other council services. This ANA is rolled forward each year to fund the SRA.
6. The SRA Board each year approves a series of projects which are collectively referred to as the Enhanced Programme. The £3.133m of funds raised will be spent on 14 projects and activities, plus staff and overheads, which stretch across the county. Full details are provided in Appendix 3.

7. The Executive is asked to review the 2025-26 SRA Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Constitution and approve its signing by the Lead Member for Public health, Climate Change and Environment on behalf of the council.

Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan

8. SRA schemes and activities support the priorities of Somerset Council
9. The work of the SRA addresses several of the priorities in the adopted Somerset Council Plan and the “Vision” for Somerset Council. The vision states:

“Somerset Council will build a fairer, greener, more flourishing, Somerset that cares for the most vulnerable and listens to you.”

10. SRA activity delivers against the priorities of:
 - A greener, more sustainable Somerset
 - A flourishing and resilient Somerset
11. The work of the SRA directly supports achieving Goal 3 of the Climate Strategy – ‘To have a Somerset which is prepared for, and resilient to, the impacts of Climate Change’. The work of the SRA helps Somerset prepare for, mitigate the impacts of, become more resilient to and ultimately adapt to, the impacts of climate change.

Other options considered

12. The only alternative option is for Somerset Council not to take on the role of the Host Authority and Accountable Body for the SRA and not to approve the funding for use by the SRA. This would result in the SRA being unable to proceed in its current form, or at all. The funding raised through the Alternative Notional Amount is explicitly for the funding of SRA activities. If the funds are not used for the SRA they will be lost to the county and the extra benefits the SRA brings will also be lost. This is not considered to be a viable option. As SRA funding is raised through Council Tax no other organisation can fulfil the role that the council can.

Key considerations for the Council

Scrutiny comments / recommendations:

13. A draft version of this report was shared with the Climate and Place Scrutiny Chair on 5 February. No queries were raised.
14. Climate and Place Scrutiny Committee received a detailed presentation on the work of the SRA on 11 November 2024. A productive discussion was had with many questions asked on topics including, the funding position of the SRA, Community Flood Action Fund and how performance is monitored of SRA funded schemes. The Committee thanked the SRA for its work.

Consultation and feedback

15. The Somerset Rivers Authority partnership holds its meetings in public and publishes all papers in advance so that members of the public have the opportunity to review and comment on the work of the partnership. The draft 2025-26 Enhanced Programme and SRA budget were considered on 24 January 2025. No public questions were submitted on this topic. The SRA Board reviewed the proposals and approved it without recommending any changes. The final programme will be confirmed by the SRA Board on 7 March, after Full Council budget setting.
16. Several amendments were made to the report as a result of officer feedback. The need for confidentiality of grant amounts was removed. Recommendation a. was changed to make it specific to the 2025/26 financial year. HR responsibilities for SRA staff was clarified. Legal recommended the MoU and Constitution be subject to a full review in advance of the 2026/27 financial year.

Financial and Risk Implications

17. Subject to confirmation of budget setting at Full Council on 5 March, funding amounting to £3,988,787 is available to the SRA for 2025-26, of which £3,112,887 is from council tax receipts, £10,000 is from the Axe Brue and £10,000 the Parret Internal Drainage Boards. £855,900 is from SRA reserves.
18. SRA funding is raised as a result of an 'Alternative Notional Amount' (ANA) added to council tax bills in 2016-17. This will be £14.65 on a Band D property for 2025-26. The funds raised are in addition to that raised for core Somerset Council functions. Funds raised for the SRA cannot be used for other reasons as this would be in contravention of why the Alternative Notional Amount was originally approved by central government.
19. Somerset Council, as the Accountable Body, will be responsible for the proper oversight, management and accounting of all funds raised for, and spent by the SRA. All SRA funds are overseen by a Somerset Council Finance Manager. The SRA Board allocates SRA funding as grants. The SRA's constitution defines the Board's purpose and authority of the Board and sets out delegations for financial decisions. All SRA Board decisions must align with Somerset Council Standing Orders and, where necessary, a key or non-key decision will be taken by the relevant council officer or Executive Member to ratify decisions of the SRA Board.
20. The flexibility afforded to Somerset Council to raise funds through Council Tax for SRA activities will continue for as long as Somerset Council chooses to raise it.

21. Without funding, the SRA would be unable to deliver its purpose of reducing the risks and impacts of flooding across Somerset.
22. If funding is not approved there would be 6 staff at risk of redundancy within the SRA partnership team and a potential financial liability for Somerset Council from redundancy payments. This financial liability is mitigated by an agreement to use any remaining SRA funds to settle this liability in the first instance.
23. The SRA provides funding to grant recipients, paid in arrears, upon evidence of agreed and eligible works being completed. Partner organisations delivering SRA-funded projects must first settle any charges and then claim funds back from the SRA by submitting a grant claim. Claim forms must be signed off by a suitably qualified officer from the delivery organisation giving the SRA assurance that any claim is for eligible spend. Somerset Council retains the right to undertake audits of the SRA expenditure if required.
24. In December 2024 the SRA launched a Community Flood Action Fund. The maximum grant will be £20,000. Town and Parish Councils, charities and other suitably constituted groups will be able to apply for funds. Grant payments will generally be made in arrears. Evidence will be required to support each grant claim before payment is made. Where there is an unauthorised project over spend the grant applicant will be responsible for this.
25. Some SRA projects occasionally face cost increases. In such a case, there is a risk that an SRA delivery partner may be unable or unwilling to absorb those costs. In this instance the SRA may be asked to fund the cost increase. When this occurs the delivery partner must seek approval for additional funding from the SRA Board in advance or risk being liable for the overspend. Any decision taken by the SRA Board must also follow council Standing Orders and regulations and, where necessary, a key or non-key decision will be taken to ratify the SRA Board decision.
26. The Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) granted £13.049m of Growth Deal funding to the 'Somerset Flooding' project in 2015. This project is overseen by the SRA Board. These LEP funds are now fully claimed but some project delivery is still underway using match funding. Until projects are fully completed there is a low risk that the LEP could claw back previously granted funds if a project is not fully completed.
27. Somerset County Council agreed to 'own' the risks associated with spending of LEP funding on behalf of the SRA. This commitment has now passed to Somerset Council (SC). This risk is mitigated by the fact that SC has signed 'strategic grant agreements' with SRA delivery partners which makes the delivery partner liable for the risk of LEP funding clawback. All LEP funds have now been claimed from the LEP, further reducing this risk.
28. Due to the measures and procedures set out above, financial risk to Somerset Council as Host Authority and Accountable Body for the SRA is deemed to be

low. The SRA follows strict processes for the allocation and management of the grant funding that it provides. These processes mean there is a low likelihood that the SRA will exceed its available funds.

Current Risk Score:

Likelihood	3	Impact	3	Risk Score	9
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Projected risk score if recommended actions are agreed and delivered:

Likelihood	1	Impact	3	Risk Score	3
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Legal and Procurement Implications

29. If Somerset Council agrees to be the Accountable Body for the SRA, then all decisions will be taken in accordance with Somerset Council's Standing Orders and procedures. This means that SRA Board decisions, where relevant, will be decisions in principle until ratified by the Accountable Body. For example, if the SRA Board takes a significant financial decision, this will be accompanied by a key or non-key decision by the Accountable Body.
30. The 2025-26 amendments to the SRA's Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and Constitution do not carry any legal implications for Somerset Council or any of the SRA partners. The SRA is an Unincorporated Association. The MoU confirms organisational support for the SRA and codifies the governance arrangements for the proper operation of the SRA Board.

HR / Workforce Implications

31. The SRA Board agrees the staffing requirement and associated budget for the operation of the SRA. As the Host Authority for the SRA Somerset Council will be responsible for employing SRA staff - 6 permanent staff, and 1 part-time (2 days per week) worker engaged through an agency. As such Somerset Council will be responsible for all HR-related matters for the directly employed SRA team.

Equalities Implications

32. No negative impacts on groups with protected characteristics are anticipated as a result of this decision.
33. This decision relates to the role that Somerset Council will fulfil as Host Authority and Accountable Body for the Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA). In this role the council will take a formal decision to allocate the funds raised through Council Tax for the activities of the SRA as set out within the SRA's Enhanced Programme. Enhanced Programme and Community Flood Action Fund (CFAF) activities are delivered by organisations using grant funding

provided by the SRA. Grant funding recipients are required to have due regard to equalities issues when planning and undertaking work.

34. Applicants to the Main Grants process and applicants to the CFAF are required to undertake and submit an equalities impact assessment (EIA) for their projects. Where an organisation has its own EIA process this can be used but where no EIA process exists, we provide an EIA template that can be used. The current SRA process ensures that an EIA is undertaken when necessary. The SRA team review submitted EIAs and can provide feedback but ultimately it is the responsibility of the grant applicant to make sure due regard issues are appropriately considered and actioned.
35. The SRA Enhanced Programme of works, funded through the Main Grants process, is a series of mostly relatively small-scale interventions related to flood risk management. The works often have localised impacts and are developed in consultation with landowners, property, owners etc. by statutory bodies such as Somerset Council, Environment Agency, Internal Drainage Boards, Natural England and Wessex Water.
36. Where community-based work is undertaken as part of the Enhanced Programme, such as building community resilience, these will be undertaken in an inclusive manner and expected to meet Somerset Council requirements on equalities and inclusion.
37. Representation of the communities of Somerset, and their various characteristics, will be achieved through councillor representation on the SRA Board. SRA meetings are public meetings. SRA projects often involve stakeholder groups. The SRA funds two community engagement officers, employed by Somerset Council, who work in communities at risk of flooding across Somerset. These officers follow Somerset Council rules and guidelines on equalities and inclusion
38. The local Memorandum of Understanding sets out that the SRA shall, where relevant and unless otherwise agreed, operate in accordance with Somerset Council practices and procedures, relating to:
 - Equalities policies.
 - Policies for dealing with access to information and data protection.

Community Safety Implications

39. There are no implications regarding crime, but the aim of the funding is to improve community safety by reducing risks associated with flooding. Addressing flood risk also has quality of life and wellbeing benefits as it reduces stress and anxiety associated with the fear of, and impacts, of flooding.
40. SRA Community Engagement Officers work closely with the council's Emergency Planning Preparedness and Response Team and actively support the Somerset Prepared community resilience partnership.

Climate Change and Sustainability Implications

41. The SRA will directly support Somerset Council to respond to the challenges of climate change. SRA funds will invest in projects that support adaptation to climate change and help communities and businesses be resilient and sustainable into the future. Some SRA-funded projects deliver multiple benefits as well as flood risk such as water quality, improved biodiversity, carbon sequestration, etc.
42. SRA projects will directly support delivery of the Climate Emergency Strategy. SRA grant application forms expressly require proposers to say how their project will help tackle climate change.

Health and Safety Implications

43. None identified linked to this decision.
44. The SRA provides grant funding for projects to organisations following an application process. Any health and safety implications associated with project delivery is the responsibility of the grant applicant.

Health and Wellbeing Implications

45. The health and wellbeing of residents impacted by flooding is improved through increasing resilience to flooding and protection from flooding. It is well established that being flooded or being at risk of flooding can negatively impact on mental health and wellbeing. All SRA funded activities aim to reduce the risks and impacts of flooding.
46. All population groups could be affected by flooding.

Social Value

47. This decision will not instigate any procurement directly but rather releases funds that can then be allocated as grants for SRA projects which are delivered by SRA partners. To date, SRA funds have been used to directly support local businesses on many projects – this will continue.
48. SRA funds support two community engagement officers who are helping local communities to increase the capacity they have to respond to the risk of flooding and adapt to likely future impacts of climate change.

Background Papers

49. Somerset Council Full Council March 2025 Budget Setting Papers


Appendices

- Appendix 1 DRAFT SRA 2025-26 Memorandum of Understanding and Constitution
- Appendix 2 DRAFT SRA Board paper 2025-26 Enhanced Programme and Budget
- Appendix 3 2025-26 SRA proposed Enhanced Programme action summaries with grant amounts

	Officer Name	Date Completed
Legal & Governance Implications	Scott Wooldridge / Jill Byron	19/02/2025
Finance & Procurement	Nicola Hix	19/02/2025
Workforce (*)	Dawn Bettridge	03/02/2025
Asset Management (*)	Simon Lewis	N/A
Executive Director	Chris Hall	03/02/2025
Executive Lead Member	Graham Oakes	17/02/2025
Consulted:	Councillor Name	
Local Division Members	List local members	
Opposition Spokesperson(s)	Cllr Dawn Denton	17/02/2025
Relevant Scrutiny Chair(s)	Cllr Martin Dimmery	17/02/2025

Somerset Equality Impact Assessment

Before completing this EIA please ensure you have read the EIA guidance notes – available from your Equality Officer or www.somerset.gov.uk/impactassessment

Organisation prepared for (mark as appropriate)	 Somerset Council	X					
Version	1		Date Completed	29/01/2025			
Description of what is being impact assessed							
<p>This impact assessment is for the Executive Decision to approve Somerset Council continuing as host authority and accountable body for the Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) partnership. The decision also approves the passing on of funds raised through council tax for the purposes of the SRA.</p> <p>The SRA, established in 2015, is a partnership organisation hosted by Somerset Council². Its purpose is to reduce the risks and impacts of flooding across Somerset by enabling its partner organisations to do extra work based on local priorities.</p> <p>The SRA operates under a governance framework set up by Somerset County Council and is overseen by a Board that includes 6 Somerset Council Councillors. The SRA follows the council model of decision making, public meetings and access to information. All SRA decisions must, where necessary, also follow Somerset Council decision making processes to conform with the accountable body Standing Orders and Financial Regulations.</p>							

² Somerset County Council before 1 April 2023

There are no direct impacts on the population as a result of this decision. The decision is an administrative process to accord with Somerset Councils' decision making requirements to confirm its role as Host Authority and Accountable Body. However, as a result of this decision the SRA will continue with a programme of grant giving that enables its constituent partner organisations to take actions that will reduce the risk and impacts of flooding. The SRA also offers grants under the Community Flood Action Fun which is open to Town and Parish Councils and other suitably constituted organisations e.g. charities.. Applicants are asked to confirm they have the policies and processes in place for undertaking EIAs for their projects if required. EIAs will be requested as part of the application process. Where a grant is given for a project, the recipient is responsible for ensuring they comply with requirements under the Equality Act

Whilst this decision itself will not have direct implications for residents, consideration has been given to whether or not residents with protected characteristics are at a disadvantage with reference to access to information on what the SRA is doing now and in the future. For example, can everyone access SRA meeting papers and decisions equally and fairly to have the opportunity to engage with the SRA if required.

Evidence

What data/information have you used to assess how this policy/service might impact on protected groups? Sources such as the [Office of National Statistics](#), [Somerset Intelligence Partnership](#), [Somerset's Joint Strategic Needs Analysis \(JSNA\)](#), Staff and/ or [area profiles](#),, should be detailed here

Somerset Intelligence has been used to understand the profile of the Somerset population and consider whether there are specific considerations required to make sure all residents can access information about the SRA. The majority of the information the SRA provides is through the SRA website.

96% of the population of Somerset has English as their first language. Of the remaining 4% ,2% say they can speak English very well, 1.5% speak English well. 0.6% cannot speak English well and 0.1% state they do not speak English. This provides reassurance that for the majority of residents of Somerset language is not a barrier to accessing information. When producing information, we make every effort to present information in a way that conforms to accessibility guidelines and the best practice for

plain English. However, given the technical nature of much of what the SRA does it can be necessary to use technical language at times.

The Somerset Rivers Authority website is not part of the public sector's digital estate. It ends org.uk not gov.uk (because technically the SRA is an unincorporated association). However, the SRA wants people to be able to use its website and to be able to understand its communications, in line with the principles set out by the government. So, for example, recent tests of sample pages using the WAVE web accessibility evaluation tool detected no errors on the website. We regularly consult the public sector accessibility requirement pages on gov.uk with the aim of doing what is best for people. So for SRA Annual Reports, for example, text only versions are produced alongside more graphic-rich versions, and pages are set out in HTML, as well as being uploaded as PDFs. We write in plain English.

Internet access and usage is high amongst age groups between 16 to 64. Usage decreases between the ages of 65-74 with 67% reporting as recent users. Over 75 years there is a decrease in internet use with 47% reporting recent usage. Whilst the vast majority of residents report as being regular internet users, as Somerset has a higher than average older population we do need to be aware of this when communicating primarily only online.

Whilst providing the majority of our information through the SRA website may not reach all sectors of the Somerset population it can be seen that the vast majority of the population can potentially be reached via this means.

96.4% of the population identify as white. 1.5% identify as Asian and 0.4% of the population identify as black. Records from the 2011 census reported that the non-white groups tended to be located in the more urban areas of the county. Where community engagement activities are to be undertaken in the more urban areas, particular consideration will be given to engaging with and making these events accessible to ethnic minority groups. SRA funded Community Engagement Officers are employed by Somerset Council and follow the equalities and accessibility rules and guidance set by Somerset Council.

SRA meetings are held in public, and questions can be submitted to the Board in advance or, at the discretion of the chair, on the day of the meeting. Meetings are held across the county in each of the old district council areas.

Where necessary, when delivering a project in a specific location, we will work with parish and town councils and others to extend the reach of our information sharing. Where a project will directly impact on residents, e.g. construction works, the project delivery partner will be expected to make local residents aware of any disruption and undertake their own assessment on requirements for project specific EIAs.

Who have you consulted with to assess possible impact on protected groups and what have they told you? If you have not consulted other people, please explain why?

No specific consultation has been undertaken with protected groups as the decision this EIA relates to does not in itself result in actions or impacts.

Analysis of impact on protected groups

The Public Sector Equality Duty requires us to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations with protected groups. Consider how this policy/service will achieve these aims. In the table below, using the evidence outlined above and your own understanding, detail what considerations and potential impacts against each of the three aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty. Based on this information, make an assessment of the likely outcome, before you have implemented any mitigation.

Protected group	Summary of impact	Negative outcome	Neutral outcome	Positive outcome
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neutral Impact 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neutral Impact 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Gender reassignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Neutral Impact	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Marriage and civil partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Neutral Impact	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pregnancy and maternity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Neutral Impact	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Race and ethnicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Neutral Impact	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Religion or belief	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Neutral Impact	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sex	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Neutral Impact	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Sexual orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neutral Impact 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Armed Forces (including serving personnel, families and veterans)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neutral Impact 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other, e.g. carers, low income, rurality/isolation, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neutral Impact 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Completed by:	David Mitchell			
Date	30/01/2025			
Signed off by:	David Mitchell			
Date	19/02/2025			
Equality Lead sign off name:	Tom Rutland			
Equality Lead sign off date:	19/02/2025			
To be reviewed by: (officer name)	November 2025			
Review date:	30/11/2025			

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DRAFT – 2025-26 Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Local Memorandum of Understanding & Constitution

Green – proposed new text

Yellow – proposed to be deleted

<p>1. Background and Context</p>
<p>1.1 The Parties</p> <p>Somerset Council (SC), the Axe Brue and the Parrett Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs), the Environment Agency, Natural England, Wessex Regional Flood & Coastal Committee and Wessex Water (together the “Parties”) comprise the Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA). These Parties, to whom this Local Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) applies, are those agreed to be represented on the SRA Board.</p>
<p>1.2 The Somerset Flood Action Plan</p> <p>The Parties, together with Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government - are committed to reducing flood risk and increasing resilience to flooding in Somerset via implementation of the Somerset Flood Action Plan, including the delivery of its Vision for the Levels and Moors (<i>Appendix One</i>). The SRA Board agreed that this will require additional expenditure on water and flood risk management and that this should be secured via an SRA precept.</p>
<p>1.2a the Somerset Rivers Authority Strategy 2024 – 2034</p> <p>During 2023 and 2024 the parties worked together to produce a new <i>Somerset Rivers Authority Strategy 2024-2034</i> and committed to developing an action plan which follows on from the original 2014 Flood Action Plan and sets new objectives for the SRA. The Parties are committed to continuing to work together as the Somerset Rivers Authority to deliver this strategy.</p>
<p>1.3 Memorandum of Understanding 8 December 2014 and sustainable funding mechanism</p> <p>Pursuant to the commitment in para 1.2 above, on 8 December 2014, a Memorandum of Understanding was agreed by the local authorities, the IDBs, Defra and MHCLG which confirmed funding totalling £2.7m available to the SRA for 2015-16. That MoU included a commitment to work together to review the options for a sustainable local funding solution for the work of the SRA from 2016-17 onwards and provide an assessment of the options for consideration by Ministers in July 2015.</p> <p>In September 2015, it was decided that the preferred funding mechanism was the establishment of the SRA as a precepting body and the Chairman of the SRA wrote to both the Secretaries of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and for</p>

Communities and Local Government with a view to discussing and agreeing how to implement this as soon as possible.

The government in its response to the Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Efra) Committee report on Future Flood Prevention, published in February 2017, gave a commitment to put the long-term funding of the SRA on a statutory basis when parliamentary time allows.

1.4 Local Government Finance Settlement 2016-17

The Local Government Finance Settlement 2016-17 included the provision of alternative notional amounts for council tax levels so that pending the establishment of the Somerset Rivers Authority as a precepting body, Somerset County Council and all Somerset district councils (now a single unitary authority Somerset Council) could set a shadow precept of up to the equivalent of a 1.25% increase in Council Tax, for the purpose of funding the Somerset Rivers Authority. This funding remains in the council tax base as long as it is raised for the purposes of the SRA.

The actual amount raised through council tax per household has remained tied to the level agreed in 2016-17. The effect of this is the charge is no longer a % of council tax levels. The amount charged is a flat rate that remains the same each year. This amount is set at £14.65 for a band D property. The total amount raised increases slightly each year as new properties are constructed and council tax is paid. £14.65 is equivalent to 0.87% of 2025-26 band D council tax.

1.5 This Local Memorandum of Understanding (Local MoU)

This Local MoU document is not intended to be legally binding on the Parties, but the Parties agree to the Local MoU, intending to honour their obligations set out in it. It will cover the period up to 31 March 2026. Section 2 of this Local MoU sets out a constitution for the SRA. Information on background papers, technical terms and acronyms, can be found in Appendix Two.

1.6 Term & Amendment

This Local MoU shall come into effect on 1 April 2025 and shall continue in force unless terminated in accordance with this Local MoU. It will be reviewed before the end of the financial year, no later than 31 March 2026.

Proposals for amendments should be communicated to the SRA Senior Manager, no less than 30 days ahead of any Board meeting at which they would need to be considered. Proposals would then be circulated for comment, and any recommendations made to the SRA Board would, in accordance with its decision-making arrangements, be decided by a simple majority.

1.7 Previous Arrangements

Prior to this Local MoU, the Parties have worked collaboratively in relation to the Somerset Rivers Authority through a Local MoU dated March 2024. Those

arrangements will be superseded by the arrangements put in place under this Local MoU.

Signed by Cllr **Graham Oakes**
on behalf of **Somerset**
Council

Date

Signed by Cllr **Mike Stanton** as
a representative of **Somerset**
Council

Date

Signed by **Tony Bradford** on
behalf of the
Parrett Internal Drainage
Board

Date

Signed by **Rebecca**
Horsington as a
representative of the
Parrett Internal Drainage
Board

Date

Signed by **Ian Withers**
on behalf of the
Environment Agency

Date

Signed by **Cllr Nick Cottle** as a
representative of **Somerset**
Council

Date

Signed by **Jeff Fear**
on behalf of the
**Axe Brue Internal Drainage
Board**

Date

Signed by **Andrew Gilling** as a
representative of the
**Axe Brue Internal Drainage
Board**

Date

Signed by **Claire Newill**
on behalf of **Natural England**

Date

Signed by **David Jenkins**
on behalf of the
**Wessex Regional Flood &
Coastal Committee**

Date

Signed by **Cllr Nick O'Donell**
as a representative of
Somerset Council

Date

Signed by **Cllr Mike Casswell**
as a representative of
Somerset Council

Date

Signed by **Cllr Harry Munt** as
a representative of **Somerset
Council**

Date

Signed by **Cllr Ros Wyke** as a representative of **Somerset Council**

Date

Signed by **Matt Wheeldon** on behalf of Wessex Water

Date

2. Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) - Constitution

2.1 Legal Status of SRA

The SRA will continue as an unincorporated association. This does not require any new statutory powers. In participating in this association, the Flood Risk Management Authorities (FRMAs, see para 2.3.1) are acting in accordance with the co-operation duty under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, Section 13.

The SRA Board has agreed it is committed to enabling the necessary legislation to be enacted to establish the SRA as an independent precepting body. ~~as soon as possible.~~

The government in its response to the Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Efra) Committee report on Future Flood Prevention, published in February 2017, gave a commitment to put the long-term funding of the SRA on a statutory basis when parliamentary time allows.

2.2 Purpose of the SRA

2.2.1 To bring together and co-ordinate the Environment Agency, Natural England, the Somerset Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs), the Lead Local Flood and Highway Authority (Somerset Council - SC) and Wessex Water in their roles as FRMAs **to reduce the risk and impacts of flooding in Somerset.**

2.2.2 To provide a strategic overview of the continued delivery of the Somerset Flood Action Plan, the Somerset Rivers Authority Strategy 2024-2034 and it's associated action plan. ~~and Flood Risk and Water Level Management in Somerset.~~

2.2.3 To provide **a strategic overview of flood risk and water level management in Somerset,** a public forum and single point of contact for collective decision-making in respect of Flood Risk and Water Level Management in Somerset.

2.2.4 To identify, prioritise, find funding for, and oversee the delivery of additional flood risk and water level management work across the whole of Somerset, over and above that which the FRMAs are able to **justify perform** within their existing funding streams. ~~and to prepare an annual programme detailing that work, to raise the necessary funds and to oversee its delivery.~~

2.2.5 ~~To prepare an annual programme detailing that work set out in 2.2.4, to raise the necessary funds and to oversee its delivery.~~

2.2.6 To enable **increased collaboration between** the FRMAs **to take on a broader role,** to ensure that Somerset's flood risk and water level management activity benefits from the collective wisdom, experience, and knowledge of all its members.

2.2.7 To undertake the detailed planning and, with government, put in place the necessary arrangements for the establishment of the SRA as a precepting body **or other appropriate permanent legal entity.**

2.2.8 To achieve long-term sustainable flood risk management funding for Somerset.

2.3 Scope of Activities

2.3.1 The geographic scope of the SRA is the whole of the area administered by Somerset Council.

2.3.2 The SRA does not **lessen diminish** the responsibilities of the individual Parties or those of riparian owners. The existing FRMAs and their existing associated funding streams, responsibilities and accountabilities continue, and their existing powers and discretions are unaffected. However, opportunities will be taken to join up delivery where agreed.

~~**2.3.3** The SRA makes publicly available, in one place, information about all the planned inland flood risk and water level management activity in Somerset, funded from Somerset FRMAs' and other local partners' existing budgets. This information is called the Somerset Common Works Programme.~~

2.3.3 The SRA prepares an annual Enhanced Programme detailing the additional work which compliments and does not duplicate the planned work of the FRMAs. The SRA provides grant funding for the delivery of such actions, details of which in respect of the 2025-26 Enhanced Programme, can be found in Appendix Three.

~~**2.3.4** The SRA prepares an annual Enhanced Programme detailing the additional work outlined in 2.2.4. The SRA funds and commissions the delivery of such actions, details of which in respect of the 2024 – 25 Enhanced Programme, can be found in Appendix Three.~~

2.3.4 The SRA co-ordinates the implementation of the **outstanding actions of the Somerset Flood Action Plan**, whose outstanding actions are contained in either the **Somerset Common Works Programme or the Enhanced Programme**. The SRA oversees and coordinates the delivery of the new Somerset Rivers Authority Strategy 2024-2034 and its associated action plan.

2.3.5 Public Sector Co-operation Agreements under the Flood & Water Management Act 2010 section 13(4) will be used as appropriate.

2.3.6 Where works are undertaken by a Party, the practices and procedures of that Party shall apply. Each of the Parties shall take responsibility for its own liabilities, including insurance: for example, through appropriate insurance cover or indemnity of Members and officers.

2.3.7 The SRA will not include within its scope activities associated with emergency response and recovery.

2.3.8 The SRA will not generally include within its scope of activities issues associated with coastal flood risk. In instances where the SRA Board agrees that a coastal flood risk project supports Flood Action Plan objectives, grant funding could be considered.

2.4 Funding

2.4.1 New funding totalling **£3,132,887 (TBC)** will be available to the SRA for 2025-26, raised by Somerset Council and the Parrett and Axe Brue IDBs as follows:

Authority	Contribution
Somerset Council	£3,112,887
Somerset Internal Drainage Boards	£20,000
Total	£3,132,887

2.4.2. Somerset Council will account for the use of all funds to the Parties as set out in para 2.7.

2.5 Host Authority

2.5.1 As recipient and accountable body for the funding contributions, Somerset Council shall act on behalf of the SRA Board as Host Authority.

In particular it shall:

- Provide the services of its Chief Financial Officer and Monitoring Officer at no cost
- Provide accounting, financial analysis, accounts payable and receivable
- Provide procurement services to all contracts SC awards on behalf of the SRA and, on request, on those of the SRA's delivery partners as required
- Employ any Host Authority staff and provide Human Resources (HR) and Information Technology (IT) services in support of them and the SRA website
- Respond to requests for information
- Carry out such other functions as may be agreed

2.5.2 The costs of the Host Authority in this role shall be covered by the funding available to the SRA and shall be separately identified in the SRA budget for the year as shall any interest accruing in respect of funding made available at the beginning or during the year.

2.5.3 The SRA shall, where relevant and unless otherwise agreed, operate in accordance with Host Authority practices and procedures, including the following:

- Procedural standing orders for the conduct of meetings
- Financial regulations
- Equalities policies
- Policies for dealing with access to information and data protection
- Employment Policies
- Formal decision-making procedures

2.6 Conduct of SRA Board Members

Members of Somerset Council, IDBs and Regional Flood & Coastal Committees are bound by their own codes of conduct, as are staff of the Environment Agency, Natural England and Wessex Water.

SRA board members, including any co-opted members, will in particular 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.

2.7 Obligations

2.7.1 As the accountable body for the funding, Somerset Council shall ringfence the funding, provide quarterly information on spend to date against budget and interest accrued to the SRA Board. In particular, Somerset Council will apply its normal financial probity and accountability controls, and will maintain reliable, accessible and up-to-date accounting records with an adequate audit trail for at least six years.

2.7.2 Other Parties shall pay to the Host Authority their contribution (see para 2.4.1) following receipt of an invoice from the Host Authority.

2.7.3 All parties shall provide timely information relating to progress, costs, benefits and impacts in connection with their roles as delivery partner in relation to the SRA Enhanced Programme (*see Appendix Three*).

2.7.3 The Parties shall, by 31 March 2025, agree the budget for 2025-26 arrangements as to the way in which SRA funding for 2025-26 shall be spent, managed, and accounted for. These shall include mechanisms for handling any underspends against budget, for managing the risk of cost increases, and for facilitating the flow of funding from Somerset Council to meet agreed expenditure incurred by another Party.

2.7.4 Somerset Council will settle all payments within 30 days of agreement and submission.

2.8 Member Organisations (The Parties)

Somerset Council, the Axe Brue and the Parrett IDBs, the Environment Agency, Natural England, the Wessex Regional Flood & Coastal Committee and Wessex Water.

2.9 SRA Board

2.9.1 Composition of Board: 6 representatives from Somerset Council, 2 representatives from the Parrett Internal Drainage Board, 2 representatives from the Axe Brue Internal Drainage Board and 1 representative each from the Environment

Agency, Natural England, Wessex Water and the Wessex Regional Flood and Coastal Committee. The Board will consist of 14 members.

2.9.2 Authority of Board: The SRA Board has the authority to:

- Agree the SRA annual Enhanced Programme and authorise Somerset Council to release SRA funding for the delivery of its current year's activities
- Endorse programmes that reduce both the risk and impact of flooding and other activities **to be carried out by the Parties. The programmes will** support the delivery of the Vision and **remaining actions in** the original Flood Action Plan and the Somerset Rivers Authority Strategy 2024-2034 and its associated action plan. **to be carried out by the Parties**
- Determine the scope of services provided by Somerset Council as Host Authority. **This will include the staffing structure and budget required to support the Board and proper functioning of the Somerset Rivers Authority.**

2.9.3 Appointment of Board Members and Period of Office: The Parties have appointed representatives to serve as members of the SRA Board. Board members shall hold office until written notification of their removal and/or replacement is received by the Host Authority or shall cease with immediate effect if they cease to hold office within that member organisation.

2.9.4 Nomination of Deputies to Attend Meetings: Each of the Parties shall nominate a deputy for its appointed Board member, to attend and to vote at any meeting of the Board in place of the appointed Board member, who for any reason is unable to attend.

2.9.5 Appointment of Chair and Vice-Chair: The SRA Board will elect a Chair and a Vice-Chair who are members of the Board. Thereafter, and until the SRA is set up as a separate precepting authority, they will hold office until they cease to be members of the Board or at the two-year anniversary of the last election, whichever is the earlier. If neither the Chair nor Vice-Chair is present, then a member shall be elected from those present to act as Chair for that meeting.

2.9.6 Co-option of additional Board Members: The SRA Board shall have the power to appoint additional non-voting members to the Board. The process for co-option is to invite expressions of interest following agreement to do so by the SRA Board. Any expressions of interest would need to be accompanied by a curriculum vitae setting out relevant skills and experience of the invited individual or representative of the invited organisation. To ensure that adequate time is available for consultation on any co-option proposal any expressions of interest should be forwarded to the SRA Senior Manager, for circulation to Board Members for comment no less than 30 days ahead of any Board meeting at which they would need to be considered. Proposals would then be put as recommendations to the SRA Board, and in accordance with its decision-making arrangements, be decided by a simple majority.

2.9.7 Voting: Decisions to be made by a simple majority of voting members attending. In the event of a tied vote, the Chair shall have a casting vote. In the event of a disclosable pecuniary interest and/or a prejudicial interest arising, a member will need to abstain from participation in accordance with normal practice.

2.9.8 Quorum: A minimum of 9 voting members, including the accountable body for the funding.

2.9.9 Access to Meetings and Information: SRA Board meetings will be open to the public. Papers will be published on the SRA website five clear working days prior to meetings. Minutes of Board meetings will also be published on the website.

2.9.10 Public Speaking and Questions: Guidance is published on the SRA website as follows:

“Public Question Time

“You may ask questions and/or make statements or comments about any matter on the agenda. The length of public question time will be no more than 30 minutes in total, unless extended at the discretion of the Chair.

“If you wish to speak at the meeting then you will need to submit your statement or question in writing by 5pm one full working day before the meeting. This can be done by sending an email to sra@somerset.gov.uk

“A slot for Public Question Time is set aside near the beginning of the meeting. However, questions or statements about any matter on the agenda for this meeting may, at the chair’s discretion, be taken at the time when each matter is considered.

“You must direct your questions and comments through the Chair. You may not take direct part in the debate, unless invited to do so by the Chair.

“The Chair will decide when public participation is to finish.

“The amount of time you speak will be restricted normally to three minutes only, although it can be extended at the discretion of the Chair.”

2.9.11 Frequency of Meetings: A calendar of meetings for each Board year will be approved by the Board and published by the beginning of each financial year. Full Board meetings are held quarterly, and extra meetings will be called in the event of an urgent decision.

2.9.12 Attendance at Meetings: Each of the Parties shall be responsible for meeting any remuneration, costs and expenses associated with attendance at meetings where the purpose is to represent their parent organisation.

2.9.13 Where a Board representative is required to attend meetings or functions on behalf of the SRA travel and subsistence costs will be met by the SRA. Expenses and costs will be refunded in accordance with Somerset Council’s travel and subsistence policy.

2.10 Officer Support and Availability of Information

2.10.1 Where appropriate, the Parties shall make such of their officers and their information available for the purposes of the SRA, and for the Host Authority to meet its responsibilities, and in particular for updating and implementing the original Flood Action Plan, the Somerset Rivers Authority Strategy 2024-2034 and its associated action plan and the outstanding works of all SRA Enhanced Programmes. **and Somerset's Common Works Programme.**

2.10.2 An officer Management Group has been set up to oversee the delivery of the SRA's Enhanced Programmes, the outstanding actions of the Flood Action Plan and the Somerset Rivers Authority Strategy 2024-2034 and its associated action plan. Their terms of reference are set out in Appendix Four and members of the SRA Management Group are senior officers as follows:

-
- Head of Climate & Natural Environment (Chair), Somerset Council
- Donna Gowler, Natural England
- Iain Sturdy, Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium
- Ross Edwards, Environment Agency
- David Mitchell, Somerset Rivers Authority Manager
- Neil Ogilvie, Somerset Council, Flood and Water Management Service Manager
- Vicky Farwig, Wessex Water
- **TBC Emergency Planning Preparation and Response Service Manager**
- **TBC Somerset Council Highways representative**

2.10.3 An officer Technical Group has been set up in support of the Board. Their terms of reference and membership are set out in Appendix Five.

2.11 Delegations / Urgent Business

2.11.1 The SRA delegations are outlined in Appendix Six.

2.12 Dispute Resolution

2.12.1 All disputes between the Parties on the meaning and interpretation of the constitution, and all disputes or differences in any way arising from the constitution, shall in the first instance be referred to the next meeting of the SRA Board for resolution.

2.12.2 In the event that the dispute is not resolved through this mechanism, it shall be referred to a mediator in accordance with the Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution (CEDR) Model Mediation Procedure.

2.12.3 All parties shall use their reasonable endeavours to conclude the mediation with 40 business days of referral of the dispute to mediation.

2.12.4. If the dispute is not resolved in accordance with para 2.12.2 within 40 business days, it shall be referred to an arbitrator to be agreed between the parties in dispute, and failing agreement, to an arbitrator appointed by the President of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators, and the Arbitration Act 1996 shall apply to any such arbitration.

2.13 Withdrawal / Termination

2.13.1. In order to withdraw from the SRA, any Party shall give not less than 3 months' notice in writing to the Host Authority to expire on 31 March in any year.

2.13.2. The Parties may agree to wind up the SRA through a decision of the SRA Board by giving not less than 3 months' notice to the Host Authority.

2.13.3 If a Party serves notice to withdraw under para 2.13.1 above, or the Parties agree to wind up the SRA under para 2.13.2 above, the Host Authority shall arrange with that Party or the Parties, such operational, administrative, and financial arrangements as may be agreed between the Parties.

2.13.4. A Party withdrawing from the SRA, or the Parties winding up the SRA, shall be entitled to receive a fair share of any assets held, offset by any liabilities, to be agreed between the Parties, at the date of the withdrawal or winding up, to be received when those assets are able to be realised.

2.13.5 In the event of the Parties winding up the SRA all redundancy liabilities for directly employed SRA staff will, in the first instance, be met using remaining SRA funds. Should the SRA funds be insufficient then the funding partners (as set out in paragraph 2.4.1) will share the remaining liabilities across the funding partners in the same proportion as their annual contribution as at the start of that financial year.

2.14 Overview and Scrutiny

~~**2.14.1** SRA scrutiny will be provided by Somerset Council. The format of SRA Scrutiny will be agreed with Somerset Council's Monitoring Officer in consultation with the SRA Chair.~~

~~**2.14.2** Officer support and administrative services for the SRA Joint Scrutiny Panel will be provided by Somerset Council's Democratic Services team.~~

2.14.1 SRA scrutiny function will be provided by the Somerset Council Climate and Place Scrutiny Committee. The work of the SRA will be considered at least once per year or by request by the Committee Chair.

2.14.2 Representatives from The Parties will be invited to attend scrutiny meetings but will not be members of the committee.

Appendix 1: A Vision for the Somerset Levels & Moors in 2030

- We see the Somerset Levels and Moors in 2030 as a thriving, nature-rich wetland landscape, with grassland farming taking place on the majority of the land. The impact of extreme weather events is being reduced by land and water management in both the upper catchments and the flood plain and by greater community resilience.
- The landscape remains one of open pasture-land divided by a matrix of ditches and rhynes, often bordered by willow trees. Extensively managed wet grassland dominates the scene with the majority of the area in agriculture in 2010 still being farmed in 2030.
- The floodplains are managed to accommodate winter flooding whilst reducing flood risk elsewhere. These flood events are widely recognised as part of the special character of the Levels and Moors.
- The frequency and duration of severe flooding has been reduced, with a commensurate reduction in the flood risk to homes, businesses and major roads in the area.
- During the summer months there is an adequate supply and circulation of high-quality irrigation water to meet the needs of the farmers and wildlife in the wetlands. On the low-lying peat moors, water levels have been adopted which conserve peat soils and avoid the loss of carbon to the atmosphere. Water quality has improved and meets all EU requirements.
- The Levels and Moors are regarded as one of the great natural spectacles in the UK and Europe with a mix of diverse and valuable habitats. Previously fragmented habitats such as fen and flower-rich meadows have been re-connected and are widely distributed. In the north of the area over 1,600 hectares are managed as reed-bed, open water, and bog. Elsewhere the populations of breeding waders exceed 800 pairs. Each winter the wetlands attract large numbers of wintering wildfowl and waders regularly exceeding 130,000 birds. Wetland species such as Crane, Bittern and pollinator populations flourish.
- Optimum use is being made of the agricultural potential of the Levels and Moors, particularly on the higher land, whilst unsustainable farming practices have been adapted or replaced to secure a robust, sustainable base to the local economy.
- New businesses, including those based on 'green tourism', have developed, meeting the needs of local people and visitors alike, while brands based on the area's special qualities are helping farmers to add value to the meat, milk and other goods and services that they produce.

- The internationally important archaeological and historic heritage of the area is protected from threats to its survival and is justly celebrated, providing a draw to visitors and a source of pride and identity to local communities.
- Farmers and landowners are rewarded financially for the public benefits and ecosystem services they provide by their land management including flood risk management, coastal management, carbon storage and the natural environment.

Somerset Levels and Moors Task Force, 31 January 2014.

Appendix 2: Background Papers, Glossary of Terms & Acronyms

A1.1 Background Information and previous meeting papers

- Background information and previous papers can be found on the Somerset Rivers Authority website at www.somersetiversauthority.org.uk

A1.2 Technical Terms

- **Prejudicial Interest** - An interest of an individual Board member, which could be perceived to represent a conflict of interest with any matter considered by the Board
- **Public Sector Co-operation Agreements** - The Flood and Water Management Act 2010 enables an FRMA to arrange for a flood risk management function to be exercised on its behalf by another risk management authority. This can be done under a Public Sector Co-operation Agreement.
- **Riparian Owner** - An owner of land or property adjoining a watercourse.

A1.3 Acronyms

- CEDR Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution
- MHCLG Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government
- Defra Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
- FRMA Flood Risk Management Authority
- HR Human Resources
- IDB Internal Drainage Board
- IT Information Technology
- MoU Memorandum of Understanding
- SC Somerset Council
- SRA Somerset Rivers Authority

Appendix 3: 2025-26 Enhanced Programme

TO BE ADDED ONCE APPROVED

SRA Reference	Title	Workstream	Location

Appendix 4: Terms of Reference – SRA Management Group

The SRA Management Group is a key part of the SRA structure providing a useful forum for consultation and information sharing between partners and the SRA Senior Manager about SRA progress and the business of the SRA Board. Members of the Group are drawn from senior officers of each of the SRA partners. The Group also oversees the delivery of SRA-funded activities and the outstanding actions of the Somerset Flood Action Plan, and delivery of the Somerset Rivers Authority Strategy 2024-2034 and its associated action plan.

The Group is involved with these programmes of work:

1. The SRA current year's Enhanced Programme. This comprises the flood risk management works for which funding has been agreed by the SRA Board.
2. The outstanding actions of the Somerset Flood Action Plan that are not included in 1. above.
3. The outstanding works of prior years' Enhanced Programmes.

The Group will:

- With regard to the delivery of all the SRA-funded programmes:
 - ~~hold the SRA Technical Group to account by monitoring~~ **Monitor overall progress and explore** in more detail where delivery/progress is flagged red (using a RAG status) **with a view to aiding projects to get back on track**
 - review key risks and issues and identify additional actions where these are insufficiently mitigated
- Monitor, update and review the framework for SRA Enhanced Programmes and prioritisation criteria, advise the SRA Board and direct the Technical Group accordingly
- Review all proposals for change to the agreed SRA Programmes that are outside the SRA scheme of delegation and provide a recommendation to the SRA Board
- Review and comment on all the other work of the SRA Board
- Review, comment and share information on all matters relating to the work of the SRA
- Review the individual Flood Action Plan work streams – overall content and progress

Membership

~~Members of the Group are senior officers as follows:~~

- ~~Kirsty Larkins (Chair), Somerset Council, Service Director – Climate, Environmental and Sustainability~~
- ~~Donna Gowler, Natural England~~
- ~~Iain Sturdy, Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium~~
- ~~Dr Rachel Burden, Environment Agency~~
- ~~Ross Edwards, Environment Agency~~
- ~~David Mitchell, Somerset Rivers Authority~~

- Neil Ogilvie, Somerset Council, Flood and Water Management Service Manager

Appendix 5: Terms of Reference – SRA Technical Group

The SRA Technical Group is a key part of the SRA's structure. It consists of technical officers from the SRA Partners and associated bodies (such as Farming & Wildlife Group SouthWest) who can contribute expertise towards a co-ordinated and efficient programme of flood risk management works.

The Group helps with the delivery of Flood Action Plan actions.

SRA Technical Group responsibilities include the following:

- Work together to identify opportunities for cost-savings through joining up activities from partner organisations and considering joint/alternative delivery approaches
- Identify opportunities for schemes with multiple benefits that a single organisation may not be able to justify in isolation
- With reference to SRA Enhanced Programmes:
 - Identify and bring forward potential schemes for funding
 - Review the viability of schemes put forward, with respect to benefits, costs, environmental impacts and deliverability, using a set of scoring criteria derived from the main objectives of Somerset's 20 Year Flood Action Plan and the SRA Strategy 2024-34
 - Prepare programmes of works from partners for approval by the SRA Board, taking demonstrable account of funding criteria and identifying delivery partners
 - Be accountable to the SRA Management Group for the delivery of SRA Enhanced Programme activities and provide information as required on progress with delivery
 - Provide a technical challenge (procurement strategy, flood risk management, project management) to implementation plans and performance
 - Identify any potential changes to Enhanced Programmes for recommendation to Management Group, and thence the Board

With reference to funding of new projects during the financial year:

- Consider proposals for funding new projects where a submission to the Main Grants or Community Flood Action Fund is not a suitable option
 - Make a recommendation to either add the proposal to the programme (tolerance up to £20,000) or reject the proposal
- Discuss issues of mutual interest in flood risk management with a view to improving practices and service delivery in Somerset

- Lead the delivery and regular monitoring of performance of actions in the Somerset Flood Action Plan and of actions associated with the new Somerset Rivers Authority Strategy 2024-2034.

The Group has a “critical friend” role and as such officers from other organisations can take part of this Group to maximise the value it brings to the process.

Membership

The Group will consist of a balanced mix of officers, including those from the following organisations, many of which contribute schemes to SRA Enhanced Programmes:

SRA Partners

- Environment Agency
- Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium
- Somerset Council – (Lead Local Flood Authority Flood and Coastal, Highways, Civil Contingencies Unit Emergency Planning Preparation and Response)
- Wessex Water

Other Organisations

- Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group SouthWest
- Natural England
- Somerset Catchment Partnership
- Somerset Wildlife Trust

SRA Technical Group meets every ~~6 weeks~~ 8 weeks.

In addition to the roles above, the Group can also make comment or recommendations on other activities such as consultation requirements for particular schemes, etc.

Appendix 6: SRA Scheme of Delegation

1. SRA decision-making processes

1.1 For as long as the SRA remains an informal partnership and not a legal entity, any decisions of the SRA Board are decisions 'in principle' and are subject to formal approval by its host authority and the accountable body for the funding it has access to. The host authority and accountable body for all the SRA funding is Somerset Council, which makes the necessary formal decisions with regard to programmes of work and spend according to the Somerset Council decision making processes including the Somerset Council scheme of delegations. These decisions, however, are informed by the SRA Board's decisions, and the decisions it makes under its own scheme of delegation; it is expected that Somerset Council's decisions will follow the SRA Board's decisions, unless they are either illegal, would put the host authority at undue financial risk, or go against Somerset Council's own code of conduct.

2. SRA Delegations

2.1 The general principles guiding the SRA's scheme of delegations are as follows:

- The SRA Board approves all Programmes of work
- No works in any of the Board approved Programmes can be deleted without SRA Board approval
- No change can be agreed that means the total SRA expenditure exceeds the total funding available across all Programmes.
- All individual works within Programmes have tolerances set
- These delegations will be kept under review and amended as deemed necessary

3.1 The Programmes of work to which these delegations apply are shown below:

- The SRA's current year Enhanced Programme. This comprises the flood risk management works for which funding has been agreed by the SRA Board on 8 March 2024.
- Outstanding works from previous years of the SRA's Enhanced Programmes.

4.1 Changes to the Programmes can be made by the SRA Senior Manager, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the SRA Board, subject to the following:

- Each change requires a formal decision paper, and a record of that decision will be kept
- A report of all changes made within the previous quarter will be reviewed by the SRA Board at the SRA Board meeting at the end of that quarter
- The SRA Management Group will review all changes made since the previous Management Group meeting.

5.1 The following changes can be made by the SRA Senior Manager in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the SRA Board.

- Additional works can be added as long as they are the next affordable works on the prioritised list of works of the SRA Board approved Enhanced Programme. Tolerance up to £200,000 £500,000.
- New works proposed by the Technical Group can be added to the SRA's Enhanced Programme during the course of a year. Tolerance up to £20,000.
- Cost increases to individual works in SRA Enhanced Programmes. Tolerance up to £200,000 £500,000 or 30% of the original budget for those works, whichever is the smaller.

5.2 The following changes can be made by the SRA Senior Manager

- Cost increases to individual works in SRA Enhanced Programmes. Tolerance up to £20,000 or 30% of the original budget for those works, whichever is the smaller.

Appendix 7: SRA Grant Guidelines

SRA grant guidelines are approved by the SRA Board and used to ensure a consistent approach to assessing proposals submitted for SRA funding.

1. Geographic scope

- Fundable works can be in or outside the county as long as they deliver Flood Action Plan objectives of benefit to Somerset. Spend outside the county boundary will only be in exceptional circumstances.
- The important factor is where the benefit is gained i.e. there is no requirement for equal spend geographically across the county
 - We will develop a programme annually that is balanced, geographically, and by type of activity, and will use judgement to assess this balance
 - The SRA will not generally fund works for protection from coastal flooding, with the coast as defined by The Coastal Protection Act 1949

2. Financial

- The SRA will fund those projects and schemes that deliver our objectives that cannot be funded from current funding streams
- SRA funding is to deliver extra over and above what would otherwise be affordable. SRA funding cannot be used to replace existing funding
- The SRA will expect that partners and other applicants have tried to secure other sources of funding before seeking SRA funding
- The SRA will encourage proposals which will lever in additional funding from other sources (i.e. jointly funded projects/works)
- The SRA does not fund emergency response and recovery actions which are the responsibility of the agencies best placed to respond to such emergencies.

3. The long view

- The SRA will assess proposals for funding against the following:
 - a) Whole life costs – to understand if there will be ongoing costs and how they will be funded
 - b) Community benefits/dis benefits – to understand what additional benefits a scheme may deliver and if there could also be negative impacts
 - c) Economic benefits/dis benefits – to understand how a proposal will support the local economy and also if it could have a negative impact on it
 - d) Environmental benefits/dis benefits – to understand what benefits or possible negative impacts a proposal may have on wider environmental issues
 - e) Addressing the Climate Emergency – to encourage projects which directly support Somerset's response to climate change by increasing resilience and encouraging adaptation to the effects of climate change
 - f) Long-term strategic plans – to understand how the proposal can support the strategic plans and objectives of other organisations

4. Flood Risk and evidence

- The SRA will support proposals that meet one or more of the Somerset Rivers Authority Strategy 2024-2034 objectives
- Concurrent with taking action and delivering works on the ground the SRA will take the opportunity to gather evidence and monitor the impacts of its actions and activities
- The SRA will rely on technical professional judgement from SRA partners, combined with existing modelling, where appropriate, to assess in-combination effects across the catchments

5. Responsibilities

- The SRA only funds and undertakes works/projects that benefit the wider community
- The SRA expects property owners (land, buildings and infrastructure) to make themselves and their property more resilient and put plans in place to manage their flood risk
- The SRA will seek to raise awareness about riparian responsibilities and encourage riparian owners to fulfil those obligations and responsibilities

6. Relationships and weightings

- The SRA uses a scoring mechanism, based on **Somerset Rivers Authority Strategy 2024-2034 the six Flood Action Plan objectives** objectives to determine the relative importance of different types and scales of need, flood risk management work and different benefits/dis benefits

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Appendix 2

Somerset Rivers Authority Board Paper

2025-26 Proposed SRA Enhanced Programme and Budget

RECOMMENDATION

The Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Board is asked to:

1. Approve the proposed 2025-26 SRA Enhanced Programme and Budget.

Purpose of the item

To review and approve the 2025-26 SRA Enhanced Programme and Budget.

Background and context

2025-26 will be the eleventh year that the SRA funds an 'Enhanced Programme' of actions to reduce the risk and impacts of flooding for Somerset residents and businesses. This extra level of protection is funded by a shadow precept raised through council tax. The Parrett and Axe Brue Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs) also contribute £10,000 each per annum. The final figure will be confirmed in February 2025, but it is estimated that the shadow precept and IDBs' contribution for the financial year 2025-26 will total approximately £3.133m.

Latest status

Seventeen grant applications with a total value of over £5.5m were submitted by SRA partners, the Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group SouthWest, Exmoor National Park Authority and Somerset Wildlife Trust in September 2024. It is not possible to fund all applications as there will be insufficient funds.

Grant applications were assessed using criteria reflecting the purpose and objectives set out in our 2024-2034 Strategy. SRA Workstream Leads reviewed all applications and met twice during November to agree which applications should be recommended to the SRA Board and how much funding each project should be offered. The recommendation was then reviewed by the Management Group on 6 December.

2025-26 Budget Summary

Table A below presents the draft 2025-26 budget. The estimated income of the shadow precept and IDB contributions combined is £3.132m.

The available contingency amount in Table A has been forecasted from the current Quarter 3 2024-25 Finance Paper (see ITEM XX).

Table A

Forecast Income and Contingency	
2025-26 Precept - estimated	£3,112,887
Internal Drainage Boards	£20,000
Available Contingency (Subject to approval Q3 2024-25 Finance paper – ITEMXX)	£855,900
2025-26 Available Funds	£3,988,787
Proposed Expenditure, Starting Contingency	
SRA core staffing (4.2FTE) and overheads, legal, finance, governance, audit, etc.	£320,000
Community Flood Action Fund	£200,000
Contingency	£459,787
Proposed 2025-26 Enhanced Programme Total	£3,009,000
Total Expenditure	£3,988,787

Table B lists the projects that are recommended for approval. The ‘location’ column refers to the location a project takes place, but in many instances the benefits of projects are realised across a wide area and in more than one location.

SRA Reference	Title of Action	Workstream	Location
CFAF-26	Community Flood Action Fund	N/A	Across Somerset
IDB19-26	River Parrett maintenance: Water Injection dredging, upper bank dredging and silt monitoring.	1	Somerset North
EA17-26	Bridgwater Tidal Barrier (contribution)	1	Somerset North
EA19	Main river enhanced maintenance	1	Levels and Moors
LP GD2b	River Sowy-King's Sedgemoor Drain (KSD) Enhancements Scheme (KSD Bank Raising	1	Levels and Moors

ENP01	Upper Barle catchment restoration	2	Somerset West
FWLM01-26	Hills to Levels: Somerset Land Management and Natural Flood Management (NFM)	2	Across Somerset
WW04	Bridgwater: Penarth Road sewer improvement and school SuDS	3	Somerset North
WW01	Local flood risk management measures across Somerset	3	Across Somerset
WW02	Frome: Lower Keyford surveys and drainage improvements	3	Somerset East
WW03	Watchet: Market Street SuDS design	3	Somerset West
LHA03-26	Highways enhanced proactive gully cleansing across Somerset	4	Across Somerset
WS5-26	Building Local Resilience	5	Across Somerset
WS5-26	Community flood warning system	5	Across Somerset

The 2025-26 Enhanced Programme, if approved, will see a mixture of projects funded across the county. There will be single site projects in Bridgwater, Frome and Watchet tackling sites at risk of flooding that have proved difficult to address for any single Flood Risk Management Authority. Rivers across the Somerset Levels and Moors will get extra maintenance to move / convey water away more quickly, allowing pumping stations to operate sooner and for longer, reducing the depth and duration of flooding. This maintenance work benefits communities far beyond the immediate location of the maintenance.

The multi-award-winning Hills to Levels project will again receive funding for natural flood management (NFM) and land management interventions across the county that tackle the sources and not just the symptoms of flooding by slowing the flow of water from the upper and mid-catchments. In the west of the county Exmoor National Park will use SRA funding to develop an innovative approach to river restoration that once completed will have extensive flood risk benefits and environmental benefits across a very special part of the Somerset landscape. Up to 25,000 highway gullies in areas susceptible to flooding will get an additional round of emptying, reducing the likelihood of flooding on the highway. The well-established and much appreciated Building Local Resilience (BLR) programme will see the SRA Community Engagement Officers supporting communities in a variety of ways to be more informed, more resilient and ready to bounce back quicker from flooding. These roles are invaluable for giving at risk communities a voice, helping them to help themselves and augmenting the work that is possible by the Risk Management Authorities alone. To

further add to what the BLR programme achieves the Community Flood Action fund will provide a source of funding for communities that have good ideas are organised and motivated to sort their local flooding issues by themselves.

Appendix 1 provides detailed descriptions for each grant proposal listed above.

A map showing project locations is provided at the end of this report.

Table C: Workstream summary

SRA actions are sorted into five workstreams, though in practice different elements sometimes overlap.

Workstream	Title	Value	% of Total
W1	Dredging and River Management	£1,740,000	54%
W2	Land Management including NFM	£429,000	13%
W3	Urban Water Management	£365,000	11%
W4	Resilient Infrastructure	£300,000	19%
W5	Building Local Resilience	£175,000	5%
CFAF	Community Flood Action Fund	£200,000	6%
		£3.209,000	100%

Summary

The 14 actions in Table B are recommended for approval as part of the 2025-26 SRA Enhanced Programme.

SRA funding will be confirmed during Somerset Council's 5 March budget setting meeting.

RECOMMENDATION

The Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Board is asked to:

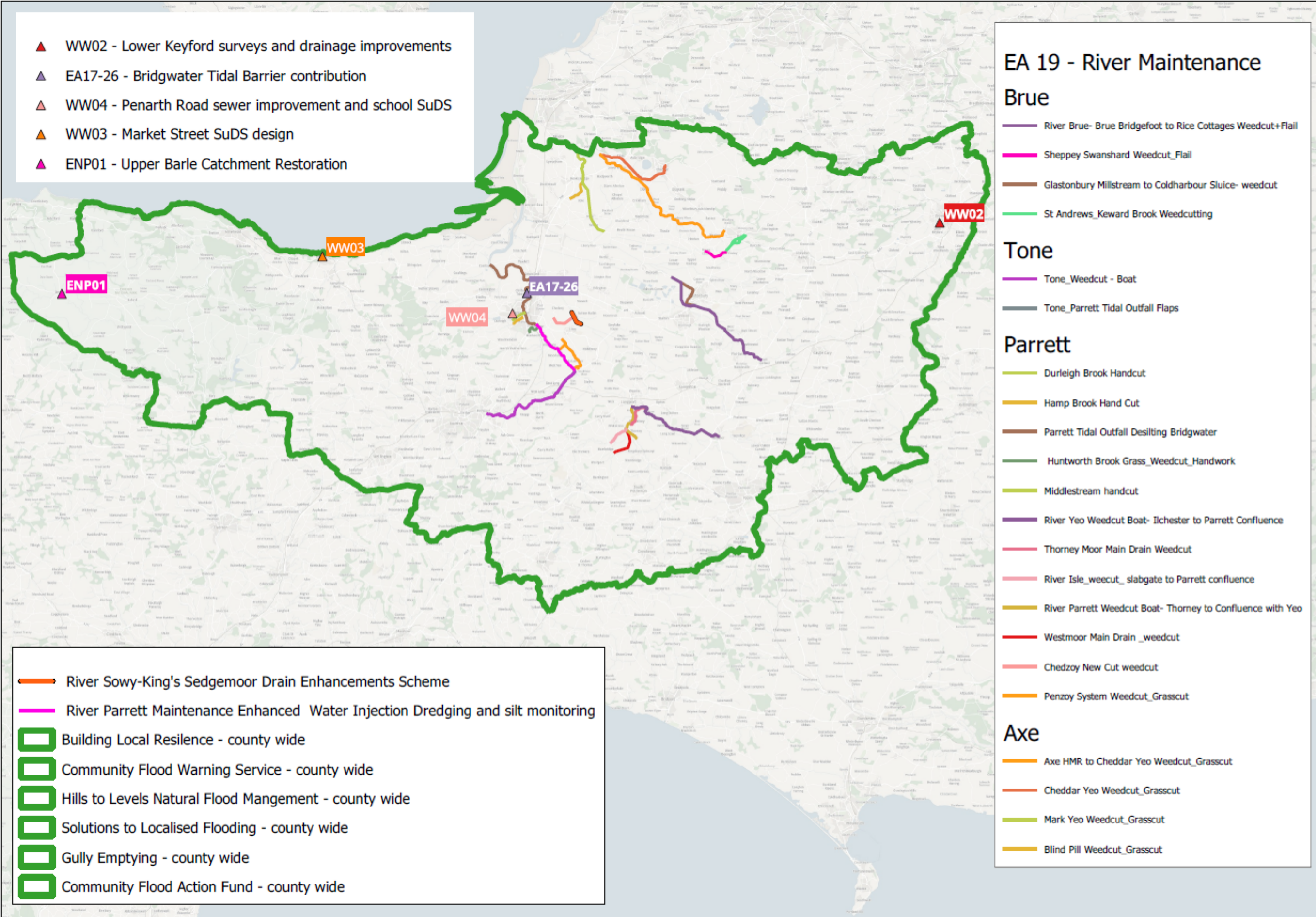
1. Approve the proposed 2025-26 SRA Enhanced Programme and Budget.

Date: 19 February 2025

Author: David Mitchell, Somerset Rivers Authority Senior Manager

Appendices:

Appendix 1: 2025-26 SRA proposed Enhanced Programme action summaries with grant amounts



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Appendix 3

Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) 2025-26 Enhanced Programme: descriptions of schemes proposed for inclusion, with grant amounts

River Parrett maintenance: Water Injection dredging, upper bank dredging and silt monitoring

Proposed grant: £650,000

SRA reference: IDB19-26

Workstream 1

A proposal to fund more maintenance dredging and silt monitoring along 3 miles (4.8 kilometres) of the River Parrett downstream of Burrowbridge. The plan - led for the SRA by the Parrett Internal Drainage Board (IDB) - is to use a Water Injection Dredging vessel in combination with an excavator mounted on a floating pontoon in the river. This pair would shift an estimated 25,000m³ of solidified sediments from the central parts of the river's channel and the higher parts of its banks. The aim is to increase the river's capacity to convey flood water.

Dredging this part of the Parrett would help to reduce flood risks for around 1,300 homes and businesses, and around 7,500 hectares of land, including 5.3 miles (8.5 kilometres) of A-roads (A372 Bridgwater-Westonzoyland, A372 Langport, A361 Othery-Athelney, A378 Wrantage), 30 miles (48 kilometres) of minor roads and 5 miles (8km) of main line rail network.

The Parrett is a tidal river. Enormous volumes of sediments flow in from the sea and from the river's big catchment, which is roughly 478 square miles in size, or 770 square kilometres. When sediments build up along the river channel, there is less space left for water, and this lessened capacity can have bad consequences for the area through which the Parrett flows. Since the devastating floods of 2013-14, a lot of dredging has been done to increase and then maintain the Parrett's capacity. Because it allows more water to be conveyed, dredging helps to delay the running of spillways and the filling up of moors, and to create possibilities for earlier pumping. SRA funding for dredging also helps to bring peace of mind to people, especially given recent record-breaking periods of intense rain.

Water Injection Dredging (WID) uses the Parrett's own tidal power. As it moves along the river, a WID vessel pumps out high volumes of water targeted at build-ups of sediment which have been identified through regular silt monitoring and channel surveys (funded by the SRA and organised by the Parrett IDB). Sediments are forced off the riverbed and then dispersed through natural processes, downstream as the tide goes out.

However, while WID is effective in removing sediments from lower central parts of the Parrett's channel, deposits tend to accrete along the higher parts of banks which WID cannot reach. Over time such build-ups make it harder to maintain an acceptable cross-sectional river area.

A short trial of Enhanced Water Injection Dredging was therefore carried out in January 2024. An excavator moved material from upper bank sections and placed it in the path of the WID vessel for washing out to sea on the outgoing tide. This trial was successful, and a similar combination is now being used in January 2025. It gets things done more cheaply and quickly, and with less environmental impact, than either method could achieve on its own.

Main river enhanced maintenance

Proposed grant: £540,000

SRA reference: EA17-26

Workstream 1

A proposal for the SRA to fund quite a large amount of maintenance work along the rivers Axe, Brue, Parrett and Tone and across their catchments. The Environment Agency is not duty-bound to do this work, except where it owns land adjoining rivers (in accordance with the fact that responsibility for the maintenance of main rivers and ordinary watercourses ultimately sits with their owners). Historically, the Environment Agency has used permissive powers to undertake various flood risk reduction activities for the public good, on watercourses classified as main rivers by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra). But more recently it has not been able to do all of the maintenance work that it used to. This is because of significant real-term reductions in central government funding (previously discussed by the SRA Board and bodies such as the Wessex Regional Flood & Coastal Committee) and inflationary pressures of up to 40% leading to significant increases in operating costs.

The SRA is therefore being asked to fund 19 main river maintenance activities, to be carried out by the Environment Agency in July – October 2025, in line with the SRA's historic remit of doing more to protect Somerset from flooding than would otherwise be affordable. Collectively, these activities will benefit hundreds of homes and businesses, and thousands of hectares of farmland:

Axe

Cheddar Yeo: Weedcut / Grasscut

Axe Head of Main River to Cheddar Yeo: Weedcut / Grasscut

Mark Yeo: Weedcut / Grasscut

Blind Pill: Weedcut / Grasscut

Brue

River Brue: Brue Bridgefoot to Rice Cottages: Weedcut
River Brue: Brue Bridgefoot to Rice Cottages: Enabling Flail
Glastonbury Millstream to Coldharbour Sluice: - Weedcut
Sheppey Swanshard: Weedcut / Flail
St Andrews / Keward Brook: Weedcut

Parrett

Westmoor Main Drain: Weedcut / Grasscut
Penzoy system: Weedcut / Grasscut
Chedzoy New Cut: Weedcut
River Yeo - Ilchester to Parrett Confluence: Weedcut Boat
River Parrett - Thorney to Confluence with Yeo: Weedcut Boat
Durleigh Brook: Hand Weedcut
Hamp Brook: Hand Weedcut
Middlestream: Hand Weedcut
Parrett: Bridgwater Tidal Outfall Desilting
Parrett: Bridgwater / Moorland Tidal Outfall Flaps
River Isle - Slabgate Weir to Parrett Confluence: Weedcut
Thorney Moor Main Drain: Weedcut
Huntworth Brook: Grasscut / Weedcut / Handwork

Tone

Tone: Weedcut Boat

One result of the recent reduction in maintenance has been uncontrolled weed growth in rivers. This growth affects how rivers respond to rainfall and how quickly they can convey flood water out to sea. The Environment Agency says that if maintenance work is not done in summer 2025, rivers will further choke up with weed. This will further reduce their capacity, increase the risk of fish dying, and spoil their leisure and amenity value. Furthermore, says the Agency, if maintenance is not done in 2025, getting river channels back to their previous capacity will probably require more expensive and difficult kinds of work to be carried out, as weed removal may no longer be possible due to excessive silting-up. Not carrying out maintenance is also judged to be a false economy, because to get water off moors and dispersed through rivers clogged with weed, more expensive pumps need to be deployed and run.

Grass cutting on raised banks across the Somerset Levels and Moors is important because it allows for flood defences to be inspected for problematic badger setts, trees, landslips and other forms of erosion such as scouring. If these defects are not remedied, banks could potentially fail, increasing flood risks to large areas.

River Sowy-King's Sedgemoor Drain (KSD) Enhancements Scheme (KSD Bank Raising)

Total project cost: £8.813m

Proposed grant: £500,000

SRA reference: LP GD2b

Workstream 1

Funding is proposed for the raising of up to 1.12 miles (1.8 kilometres) of the left bank of King's Sedgemoor Drain (KSD) in the late summer and early autumn months of 2025, following extensive preparations carried out for the SRA by the Parrett Internal Drainage Board (IDB). This work would complete Phase 1 of the SRA's major River Sowy-KSD Enhancements Scheme, on which work began in 2016. The main aim of this scheme is to increase the amount of water that can flow, in a controlled way, through the Sowy-KSD system. In combination with other projects and activities in the SRA's Enhanced Programme, such as dredging and main river maintenance, this scheme will help to reduce flood risks for people, homes, farms, businesses, land, and infrastructure across 150 square miles of the Somerset Levels and Moors.

The River Sowy was created between 1969 and 1972 to take excess water away from the River Parrett (this is why the Sowy is also known as the Parrett Flood Relief Channel). Water flows into the Sowy through a sluice called Monk's Leaze Clyse near Combe north-west of Langport. It goes down via Beer Wall beneath the A372 near Othery to King's Sedgemoor Drain near Greylake, then it re-joins the Parrett through Dunball Sluice, 13.5 miles (22 kms) after it went through Monk's Leaze Clyse. Providing more capacity in this system, so that it can be used more flexibly and effectively, has been one of the SRA's main ambitions since the SRA was launched in January 2015.

Bridgwater Tidal Barrier (contribution)

Total project cost: £248.4m

SRA funding to date: £3.32million

Proposed grant: £50,000

SRA reference: EA17-26

Workstream 1

Bridgwater Tidal Barrier is a major project led by the Environment Agency and Somerset Council. Designed to help protect more than 11,300 homes and 1,500 businesses, it has three main elements: a tidal barrier on the River Parrett at Chilton Trinity, 2.67 miles (4.3km) of new flood defence banks and 1.74 miles (2.8km) of raised banks downstream at Chilton Trinity, Comwich and Pawlett, and fish and eel passage improvements at 12 sites upstream of the barrier, the furthest up being Bradford-on-Tone beyond Taunton, and Ham Weir between East Lambrook and Martock. Other planned enhancements include a new cycle and foot bridge over the Parrett, and the creation of up to four hectares of wetland habitat and up to eight hectares of open water in borrow pits (pits from which suitable material has been

taken for bank-raising). Links for walkers are to be established with the Parrett Trail, the South West Coast Path, and wetlands at Steart Marshes.

The Full Business Case for the Bridgwater Tidal Barrier was approved by HM Treasury in September 2024. Most funding for this major project – it is one of the biggest in the country - will come from central government major project funding. However, some local match funding is required to secure the national funding. As in previous years, Somerset Rivers Authority is making a local contribution in recognition of the important role that Bridgwater Tidal Barrier will fulfil in protecting Somerset residents, homes and businesses.

In total in previous years, the SRA has contributed £3.32million towards the Barrier project, including £2million of Growth Deal funding that came through the SRA from the now-defunct Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership.

Hills to Levels: Somerset Land Management and Natural Flood Management (NFM)

Proposed grant: £324,000

SRA reference: FWLM01-26

Workstream 2

Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) is proposing to keep funding a wide range of land management and natural flood management (NFM) activities across Somerset, as part of the multiple award-winning Hills to Levels project. Such works continue to have two main aims. Firstly, to reduce local flood risks for people, properties, businesses, and roads in upper and middle catchment areas. Secondly, to help protect vulnerable lower areas from flooding, by slowing the flow of water down through the catchments of the Tone, Parrett, West Somerset Streams, Brue, Axe and Somerset Frome.

For 2025-26 four main strands of activity are planned, all to be delivered for the SRA by the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group SouthWest (FWAG SW).

1. Designing and implementing up to 20 NFM schemes to hold back water in upper and mid catchments and reduce peak flows of water down to vulnerable areas. Several schemes stem from involvement with communities, for example from local people working together with FWAG SW's two part-time SRA-funded community sub-catchment enabling officers (whose contracts were extended by the SRA Board in September 2024).

Plans sometimes change for reasons beyond SRA partners' control, but examples of places currently expected to feature are:

Frome: bank regrade, bunds, leaky wood dams and tree planting

Frome: flood plain meadow restoration, scrapes, series of three attenuation features
North Brewham: reinstating original meandering of stream
Bruton: installation of scrape and bund plus tree works
Doulting: dredging of ponds and intercepting flow pathways
Kingston St Mary: removing miscanthus, creating a series of bunds and attenuation areas (three sites)
Crowcombe: installation of cross drains and flow spreaders
Merridge (on the Quantocks): installation of flow spreaders to help reduce road flooding

2. Increasing the uptake of land and soil management techniques which improve the infiltration of water into the ground, reduce the run-off of water and lessen compaction and erosion.

3. Responding to referrals of cases from Somerset Council's Highways Department or its Flood and Water Management team. FWAG SW advisers can be asked to help in cases where better land management or natural flood management, or both, could help to reduce flooding on roads because of run-off from fields. It makes sense to address causes as well as symptoms. Extra SRA funding enables partners working together to tackle issues beyond their usual limited remits.

4. Modelling and monitoring at sub-catchment scale to demonstrate the effectiveness of NFM measures that have already been installed. Tools would include flow gauges, data loggers and trail cams to record flows before, during and after storms.

Upper Barle catchment restoration

Total project cost: £149,000

Proposed grant: £105,000

SRA reference: ENP01 Workstream 2

This proposal is the first made by Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA) to Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA), as a result of the SRA opening up its grant-giving process to more applicants.

It's for a study of how to reconnect part of the River Barle to its historic floodplain, so water is slowed and spread out. The site is directly south of the B3223 at Simonsbath, and a small distance downhill from part of the Two Moors Way. The Barle here was artificially straightened in the 18th century. The section being considered for restoration is 0.53 miles long (850 metres), its floodplain 3.5 hectares.

This proposal has several aims. One: to work out the best ways of holding back and storing water, to help reduce flood risks as far down as places such as Dulverton and Brushford, which between them have flooded 14 times since 1980. Also downstream, showing the power of the Barle in spate, the scheduled ancient

monument and popular visitor spot Tarr Steps has been damaged several times by flood water, with rebuilding required in 2012, 2016, 2017 and 2023.

Two: to see how to bring about numerous environmental improvements in a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a National Park, in line with the SRA Strategy's fifth objective, which is to "conserve and enhance Somerset's special environments". A Natural England study in 2016 suggested that holding back more water could help to reduce the dispersion of non-native invasive species (especially Montbretia) during periods of spate. A less kinetic river could help riverfly numbers, and so benefit salmon, grayling and dippers. An associated study funded by the National Park Authority is also to look at ways of reintroducing water voles to the Upper Barle catchment.

Three: this study would be tied in with a nearby scheme to plant trees in three steep-sided combs adjacent to the Barle, using a recently developed technique known as applied nucleation to gradually create more connected temperate rainforest. Along with some leaky dams, this planting would help to slow the flow of water down to local tributaries of the Barle.

Four: educational and economic benefits. As the study area sits within land owned by Exmoor National Park Authority, which also includes an outdoor education centre at Pinkery, it is intended to engage with local communities, around Simonsbath and across Exmoor, and also with visitors.

Five: the area also sits within a Landscape Recovery scheme (Reviving Exmoor's Heartlands) that is currently in its development phase. Carrying out a feasibility study would make it possible that Landscape Recovery money could, in due course, fund or part-fund River Barle restoration works at Simonsbath.

Local flood risk management measures across Somerset

Total project cost: £120,000

Proposed grant: £90,000

SRA reference: WW01

Workstream 3

A second year of funding is proposed for a partnership project designed to reduce local flood risks across Somerset through the carrying-out of joint investigations and high-level assessments of possible remedial actions. This project is led by Wessex Water and Somerset Council as partners in Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA).

In 2024-25, the project's first year, 20 initial investigations were completed. Five areas in Wellington, Bridgwater, Highbridge and Taunton had flooding issues which were addressed through business-as-usual activities or separate external projects.

Three individual schemes have come forward for separate funding, in Bridgwater, Frome and Watchet (see below).

12 continuing investigations into 2025-26 include areas within:

- Creech St Michael
- Wiveliscombe
- Wellington
- Bridgwater
- Taunton
- Cheddon Fitzpaine
- Yeovil
- Wookey Hole
- Chedzoy

In 2025-26, the project team will continue to take these places through up to three different phases, as judged locally appropriate. Phase 1 is an initial assessment of various complex flooding issues, relating to the interaction of groundwater, surface water, road drainage systems, sewer networks, rivers, and other watercourses and in some cases the sea, and the effects of climate change. Phase 2 consists of more detailed investigations and the development of detailed designs. Phase 3 will involve carrying out small-scale works, or where larger-scale projects are required, future individual schemes will be put forward for funding.

Some places may also be added to Phase 1 if new complex flooding issues are brought forward by stakeholders during the year.

The SRA has been asked to part-fund 75% of this project, Wessex Water 25%, while Somerset Council will contribute staff time, because all factors involved do not come under the remit of any one single organisation. Enabling a range of partners to work together on local priorities is intended to produce better, more integrated results for local people and local environments. A further aim is to increase local people's understanding of flood-related catchment and climate change factors, so they could become more resilient and better prepared.

Bridgwater: Penarth Road sewer improvement and school SuDS

Total project cost: £465,000

Proposed grant: £200,000

SRA reference: WW04

Workstream 3

A scheme to reduce surface water flooding from local highways and the sewer in Penarth Road, Bridgwater, outside the entrance to St Joseph's Catholic Primary School and in the school playground and car park. Children walking to and from school have had to wade through contaminated water. Wessex Water and Somerset Council are eager to improve matters, so have asked the SRA to fund 43% of the cost of works (Wessex Water 57%) to reduce the risk of flooding by reconfiguring the local sewerage and highway network and installing SuDS (Sustainable Drainage Systems) at the school. The SuDS would store rainwater in environmentally friendly and educationally useful and interesting ways. It is hoped the site could become a showcase for informing Somerset pupils and residents about aspects of flooding - and inspiring people to launch their own SuDS initiatives.

This proposal follows investigations part-funded by the SRA in 2024-25. Put simply, these found that problems were largely caused firstly by too much water from highway gullies in Penarth Road, Park Avenue and Quantock Avenue flowing into the sewer network, and secondly by the foul sewer in Penarth Road and Park Avenue having too sharp a bend, so its contents cannot be sped through fast enough.

The SRA has been asked to part-fund this scheme, as the works proposed go beyond any single partner's statutory responsibilities and 'business as usual' activities.

Frome: Lower Keyford surveys and drainage improvements

Total project cost: £140,000

Proposed grant: £60,000

SRA reference: WW02

Workstream 3

A proposal to reduce the high risk of surface water flooding at Lower Keyford in Frome. Following initial investigations part-funded by the SRA in 2024-25, Wessex Water and Somerset Council want to undertake surveys of various drainage infrastructure including a culverted watercourse that runs alongside Lower Keyford. Once better informed, their aim is to design and construct a series of local measures to reduce the risk of surface water flooding for residents and road users, and to reduce storm overflows from Wessex Water sewers.

Improved management of surface water would help to reduce the frequency of storm overflows from the Wessex Water combined sewer network downstream of Lower Keyford. This would result in some improvements in water quality in the Dippy stream and the River Frome.

The SRA has been asked to fund 43% of the cost of this partnership scheme (Wessex Water 57%), as the works proposed go beyond any single partner's statutory responsibilities and 'business as usual' activities.

Watchet: Market Street SuDS design

Total project cost: £30,000

Proposed grant: £15,000

SRA reference: WW03

Workstream 3

A proposal for the design of improved rainwater and surface water management measures to reduce the high risks of surface water flooding in the Market Street area of Watchet town centre. Following detailed investigations part-funded by the SRA in 2024-25, Wessex Water and Somerset Council want to work out the best ways of retrofitting SuDS into the Market Street car park (owned by Somerset Council) and encourage the use of SuDS and innovative rainwater management nearby.

The SRA has been asked to fund half the cost of this design project (Wessex Water would fund the other half), with Somerset Council contributing staff time, on the basis that it would go beyond any single partner's statutory responsibilities and 'business as usual' activities.

The possible benefits of implementing SuDS in the Market Street area of Watchet would include:

- reduced flood risks for local properties and businesses
- less surface water getting in to combined sewers, so they are less likely to operate
- reduced flood risks for the Market Street car park, especially its entrance
- less run-off water from the car park flowing into the adjacent Washford River

Highways enhanced proactive gully cleansing across Somerset

Proposed grant: £300,000

SRA reference: LHA03-26

Workstream 4

Gullies in places most at risk of flooding across Somerset are currently cleansed once a year by Somerset Council's Highways Department. Extra SRA funding would mean that around 25,000 gullies could be emptied twice a year.

The aim would be to help keep roads open in places highly susceptible to flooding, make them safer, preserve access for communities, and safeguard properties from flooding, all in line with the objectives of Somerset's 20 Year Flood Action Plan and the SRA's Strategy for 2024-34. These works would benefit residents, businesses, and visitors.

Building Local Resilience

Proposed grant: £130,000

SRA reference: WS5-26

Workstream 5

This proposal is to fund the continued employment of two SRA community engagement officers until the end of October 2026.

The current team do a lot. They help large numbers of people to plan and prepare for possible flooding, and - when flooding does occur, as somewhere in Somerset it always will - to reduce its impacts, respond well and recover quickly. They help to strengthen communities (and the SRA partnership itself) through a wide range of activities and events. In fairly broad terms, these would continue to include:

- visiting numerous places, listening to local people, talking about the likely causes of flooding problems and possible improvements, providing guidance and training about issues such as riparian rights and responsibilities, pointing people towards appropriate agencies and discussing more complex situations in detail with SRA Technical Group members.

- raising awareness and increasing understanding of what local people can do themselves to be better prepared for flooding and a changing climate, with more intense and unpredictable rainfall. So in practice providing advice, information and support, for example through running workshops about how to develop community emergency plans.

- engaging with communities who have been flooded, for example through organising flood drop-in sessions, running flood cafés, writing regular newsletters that provide updates and promote resilience, and supporting the Lead Local Flood Authority's formal 'Section 19' flood investigation report process.

- supporting projects led by SRA partners, so where possible these are focused not just on technical activities (maintenance, NFM, SuDS, etc) but on sharing knowledge and encouraging more local resilience and adaptation. So in practice, for example,

helping with public events such as drop-in sessions about flooding: preparing, advising, participating.

- working with other organisations to encourage preparedness in communities at risk. So in practice, for example, representing the SRA in the Somerset Prepared multi-agency partnership, and leading the organisation of the annual Somerset Prepared community resilience event and smaller roadshow events.

- supporting flood groups and other community groups, existing and emerging, helping to create links between them and useful networks across catchments and sub-catchments.

- assisting with an SRA-funded Somerset Prepared small grants scheme for community resilience training and equipment, for flood groups, community groups, parish and town councils, and supporting and promoting the SRA's new Community Flood Action Fund.

- developing materials and activities to inform a wide range of organisations, people and age groups about flooding, for example Local Community Networks and primary schools (leading popular assemblies and lessons).

- helping to shape and bring about community flood resilience initiatives such as the ongoing Community Flood Warning Systems pilot project (below, in this Enhanced Programme) and a planned new website to do with flooding matters across Somerset catchments.

Community flood warning systems

Proposed grant: £45,000

SRA reference: WS5-4-26

Workstream 5

Partial funding for the fourth phase of a pilot project working with communities on very localised early flood warning systems. SRA money would be used to pay for community training sessions, a year's licensing costs for greatly increased web platform functionality and trials of a more individualised alerting system. Near the end there would be a series of 'lessons learned' events to strengthen future projects, especially those connected to local flood warning systems, in ways that would tie them in with other community self-help and preparedness activities, and local flood resilience planning.

This project began in West Somerset in 2019 (Phase 1) and was then expanded to include places in South Somerset and Mendip (Phase 2) and the River Cam valley in the east of Somerset (Phase 3). It's now managed by the SRA's community engagement team, with valuable technical support from the Environment Agency.

Its spur was people wanting much more localised information than they could get through the Environment Agency's existing system of flood alerts and flood warnings. Because - particularly in 'rapid response' catchments where water levels can rise very quickly during heavy rain - flooding can put people's lives at risk.

Local people using local knowledge have therefore been picking out hotspots for gathering vital details about what is happening in catchments during very wet times and what is therefore likely to ensue downstream. These hotspots have been kitted out with rainfall and flood gauges and other equipment linked to online dashboards so that local people can monitor what is going on, get alerts and put previously developed Community Emergency Plans into action. Communities' own spin-off projects have included setting up community rain gauges to help provide information for alerts, creating WhatsApp Channels for alerts and devising their own alert systems based purely on rainfall data, which can help to provide warnings about surface water flooding.

The service overall has grown to be deeply appreciated by communities involved while the web platform used is now flexible and robust enough to support collaboration from other agencies. A neighbouring local authority has also joined.

The fourth phase now being proposed for SRA funding would follow on from previous moves. Greater involvement and commitment would be sought from other agencies, authorities and communities, so a long-term funding base could be secured and this pilot fledged into a sustainable, ongoing project.

See the Somerset web platform:

<https://cfh.aquaticinformatics.net/AQWebPortal/Data/Map/Parameter/Stage/Statistic/LATEST/interval/Latest>

Community Flood Action Fund

Grant approved at September 2024 SRA Board meeting): £200,000

SRA reference: CFAF-26

Workstreams 1 to 5 (potentially)

In September 2024 the SRA Board agreed to pre-allocate £200,000 for a new Community Flood Action Fund (CFAF). The Fund was then launched in December 2024. It has been attracting a lot of interest across Somerset.

The Fund offers small grants for works to reduce flooding directly to Somerset communities. The idea is to help people with good local knowledge of flooding problems take the initiative and get things done.

The Fund is aimed at not-for-profit organisations, such as town and parish councils, charities, social enterprises and community benefit societies. They are being urged to concentrate on practical actions that can be achieved quite quickly, with obvious flood risk reduction benefits.

Application packs for CFAF grants of between £3,000 and £20,000 are now available through the Grants section of the Somerset Rivers Authority website.

The deadline for the first round of applications is 25 February 2025. Successful applicants will get funding from April. Three more funding rounds are due later in the year.