



Notice of Meeting of

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - CLIMATE AND PLACE

Wednesday, 17 January 2024 at 10.00 am

John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton TA1 1HE

To: The members of the Scrutiny Committee - Climate and Place

Chair: Councillor Martin Dimery

Vice-chair: Councillor Adam Boyden

Councillor Steve Ashton

Councillor Bente Height

Councillor Henry Hobhouse

Councillor Dave Mansell

Councillor Harry Munt

Councillor Alex Wiltshire

Councillor Alan Bradford

Councillor Edric Hobbs

Councillor Marcus Kravis

Councillor Matthew Martin

Councillor Tom Power

For further information about the meeting, including how to join the meeting virtually, please contact Democratic Services democraticservicesteam@somerset.gov.uk.

All members of the public are welcome to attend our meetings and ask questions or make a statement **by giving advance notice** in writing or by e-mail to the Monitoring Officer at email: democraticservicesteam@somerset.gov.uk by **5pm on Thursday, 11 January 2024**.

This meeting will be open to the public and press, subject to the passing of any resolution under the Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A: Access to Information.

The meeting will be webcast and an audio recording made.

Issued by (the Proper Officer) on Tuesday, 9 January 2024

AGENDA

Scrutiny Committee - Climate and Place - 10.00 am Wednesday, 17 January
2024

Public Guidance Notes contained in Agenda Annexe (Pages 7 - 8)

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1 Apologies for Absence

To receive any apologies for absence.

2 Declarations of Interest

To receive and note any declarations of interests in respect of any matters included on the agenda for consideration at this meeting.

(The other registrable interests of Councillors of Somerset Council, arising from membership of City, Town or Parish Councils and other Local Authorities will automatically be recorded in the minutes: [City, Town & Parish Twin Hatters - Somerset Councillors 2023](#))

3 Minutes from the previous meeting (Pages 9 - 16)

To approve the minutes from the previous meeting held on 22nd November 2023.

4 Public Question Time (Pages 17 - 20)

The Chair to advise the Committee of any items on which members of the public have requested to speak and advise those members of the public present of the details of the Council's public participation scheme.

For those members of the public who have submitted any questions or statements, please note, a three minute time limit applies to each speaker and you will be asked to speak before Councillors debate the issue.

We are now live webcasting most of our committee meetings and you are welcome to view and listen to the discussion. The link to each webcast will be available on the meeting webpage, please see details under 'click here to join online meeting'.

5 Scrutiny Climate and Place Work Programme (Pages 21 - 22)

To receive an update from the Service Manager, Governance Scrutiny. To assist the discussion, the following documents are attached:-

- (a) The Committee's work programme
- (b) The Committee's outcome tracker

Please use the following links to view the latest Somerset Council Forward Plans and Executive Forward Plan of planned key decisions that have been published on the Council's website:

[Somerset Council Forward Plans](#)

[Somerset Council Executive Forward Plan](#)

6 Economy, Employment and Planning: Level 2 Devolution Deal Position Statement (Pages 23 - 26)

To note the report.

**7 Somerset Rivers Authority: Draft Strategy and Flood Action Plan 2024-2034
(Pages 27 - 110)**

- 1) To review and comment on the early draft of Executive Decision SRA funding decision report that will be considered on 6 March 2024.
- 2) To consider the draft SRA Strategy and provide feedback on its content.

8 Waste Services: Flex Collect Update (Pages 111 - 114)

To note the update.

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Guidance notes for the meeting

Council Public Meetings

The legislation that governs Council meetings requires that committee meetings are held face-to-face. The requirement is for members of the committee and key supporting officers (report authors and statutory officers) to attend in person, along with some provision for any public speakers. Provision will be made wherever possible for those who do not need to attend in person including the public and press who wish to view the meeting to be able to do so virtually.

Inspection of Papers

Any person wishing to inspect minutes, reports, or the background papers for any item on the agenda should contact Democratic Services at democraticserviceteam@somerset.gov.uk or telephone 01823 357628.

They can also be accessed via the council's website on [Committee structure - Modern Council \(somerset.gov.uk\)](#)

Members' Code of Conduct requirements

When considering the declaration of interests and their actions as a councillor, Members are reminded of the requirements of the Members' Code of Conduct and the underpinning Principles of Public Life: Honesty; Integrity; Selflessness; Objectivity; Accountability; Openness; Leadership. The Code of Conduct can be viewed at: [Code of Conduct](#)

Minutes of the Meeting

Details of the issues discussed, and recommendations made at the meeting will be set out in the minutes, which the Committee will be asked to approve as a correct record at its next meeting.

Public Question Time

If you wish to speak or ask a question about any matter on the Committee's agenda please contact Democratic Services by 5pm providing 3 clear working days before the meeting. (for example, for a meeting being held on a Wednesday, the deadline will be 5pm on the Thursday prior to the meeting) Email democraticserviceteam@somerset.gov.uk or telephone 01823 357628.

Members of public wishing to speak or ask a question will need to attend in person or if unable can submit their question or statement in writing for an officer to read out, or alternatively can attend the meeting online.

A 20-minute time slot for Public Question Time is set aside near the beginning of the meeting, after the minutes of the previous meeting have been agreed. Each speaker will have 3 minutes to address the committee.

You must direct your questions and comments through the Chair. You may not take a direct part in the debate. The Chair will decide when public participation is to finish. If an item on the agenda is contentious, with many people wishing to attend the meeting, a representative should be nominated to present the views of a group.

Meeting Etiquette for participants

Only speak when invited to do so by the Chair.

Mute your microphone when you are not talking.

Switch off video if you are not speaking.

Speak clearly (if you are not using video then please state your name)

If you're referring to a specific page, mention the page number.

There is a facility in Microsoft Teams under the ellipsis button called turn on live captions which provides subtitles on the screen.

Exclusion of Press & Public

If when considering an item on the agenda, the Committee may consider it appropriate to pass a resolution under Section 100A (4) Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 that the press and public be excluded from the meeting on the basis that if they were present during the business to be transacted there would be a likelihood of disclosure of exempt information, as defined under the terms of the Act.

If there are members of the public and press listening to the open part of the meeting, then the Democratic Services Officer will, at the appropriate time, ask participants to leave the meeting when any exempt or confidential information is about to be discussed.

Recording of meetings

The Council supports the principles of openness and transparency. It allows filming, recording, and taking photographs at its meetings that are open to the public - providing this is done in a non-disruptive manner. Members of the public may use Facebook and Twitter or other forms of social media to report on proceedings. No filming or recording may take place when the press and public are excluded for that part of the meeting.



Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee - Climate and Place held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Cannards Grave Road, Shepton Mallet BA4 5BT, on Wednesday, 22 November 2023 at 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Adam Boyden (Vice-Chair)

Cllr Steve Ashton

Cllr Henry Hobhouse

Cllr Dave Mansell

Cllr Harry Munt

Cllr Bente Height

Cllr Marcus Kravis

Cllr Matthew Martin

In attendance:

Other Members present remotely:

30 Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1

Apologies were received from Councillors.....Dimmery, Power, Wiltshire, Hobbs, (Lovell Substituting for Hobbs).

31 Minutes from the Previous Meeting - Agenda Item 2

Resolved that the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee - Climate and Place held on 20th September 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

32 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 3

No new declarations of Interest were made.

33 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4

There were no public questions.

34 Externally Funded Regeneration Projects - Agenda Item 5

The interim Assistant Director for Assets and Major Projects provided a presentation to the Committee detailing the Externally Funded Regeneration Projects.

During the debate the following comments and questions were raised:-

- Yeovil refresh, £4.3 million needing to be redirected due to not being able to continue with cattle market developments.
- Using remaining funds on retail to residential conversion for buildings located in some of the redevelopments undertaken. The Wilkinsons building is still with the administrators, and being considered, The NHS confirmed they wanted a presence on the high street.
- The option of Council offices being located the town centre were are also being considered.
- Confirmed that the plan is for front offices to be installed into the library in the near future.
- Funding being received for regeneration across the county was considered a positive, however concerns were expressed over funding being focused on projects across the built-up areas of the county, funding towards the rural areas for employment opportunities, transport and infrastructure in Somerset was encouraged in not losing sight of rural areas.
- Funding for town deals were based on criteria government set out and based on a town investment plan being submitted.
- Although funding was targeted at towns, following the announcement this week for Tonedale Mill regeneration, there was disappointment that the rural mobility strategy has no funding associated to bid for and its left with existing resources to address this problem. There was a significant challenge to continue funding every project at the same level given the context of the financial emergency.
- Where there were instances of match funding commitments, it was questioned how this would work if match funding from the Council was withdrawn. This was a risk along with a recognised threat that this could be the last funding bids for several years due to a lack of resource due to the financial emergency.
- Match funding commitments totalled less than 1% of the £120million funding being allocated.
- Scope remained within funding streams to change by 30%. Beyond this approval is required from the department. The Council has good relationships

with colleagues in Homes England and beyond, all projects were suffering from inflation costs of materials for the projects whilst there being no spare money from the projects to address this.

- Difficult choices were having to be made in sustaining capacity across regeneration activity which remained discretionary activity.
- Staffing costs could be absorbed into the funding, work was ongoing to consider how partners could bring forward regeneration schemes with the Council playing an enabling role as opposed to a delivery role.
- Loss of skills and knowledge was recognised as an issue with large changes to the Council. There remained many town councils looking at what they could do, alongside the opportunity for bigger town councils to look at Economic Development functions.
- In reference to the Bridgwater Tidal barrier funding of £2 million. It was questioned if this was for flooding or electric generation? The tidal barrier was a flood defence project and part of a bigger programme than solely the funding, the £2 million was towards the creation of a cycle path and not the delivery of the barrier. The Council was only responsible for the delivery of the active travel element of the project.
- The Committee thanked Officer and noted the report.

35 LEP Integration - Agenda Item 6

The Service Manager for Economy presented the report to the Committee which set out the LEP Integration.

During the debate the following comments and questions were raised:-

- More information was requested in respect of how Somerset benefits.
- Reason government is moving on from LEP's is due to the democratic deficit.
- In its peak period LEP's managed a growth deal funding regime which was a capital funding regime around £100million of growth deal capital. Somersets benefit was £35 million.
- Local control is really important, as a result the government is moving away from Local Enterprise Partnerships.
- Concerns that the required extra funding for this could cause future revenue problems, there is no current information provided on what future government funding allocations will look like to deliver LEP functions.
- It could be considered an opportunity for Somerset with a more democratic process and an opportunity to take better ownership of implementing funding.
- Engaging with individuals in local processes could give greater internal

control over investment decisions made for Somerset.

- The economic growth board and how would this work with the regeneration board was questioned, further work was needed in Governance terms, and consider guidance that comes out of Government.
- The Committee thanked the Service Manager and noted the report.

36 UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund - Agenda Item 7

The Service Manager for Economy presented a report which provided an update on the Shared and Rural Prosperity Fund for England.

During the debate the following comments and questions were raised:-

- Concerns were expressed with the difficulties experienced in accessing funds. It was questioned how the fund helps those in the rural areas and where the funding is being distributed across Somerset.
- More information was requested in respect of the governance processes of the two funds and how initiatives could be put forward. This could be done using the standard governance processes for officer non key decision process in consultation with UKSPF and members.
- The process encouraged all applicants to work across Somerset where appropriate, discrepancies could be monitored and targeted across the geographical spread in the rural communities. This was a relatively small pot of money for a large scheme so there was a strategic approach for provision across all areas.
- Funding not allocated to 2024/2025 will be returned. Concerns were expressed by elected members not seeing money land.
- A more detailed overview of the UKSPF was requested. The Governance came from Government which had to be followed; to manage the money in a compliant process.
- The Impact of the fund distribution to communities would be covered in a fuller more detailed response.
- Councillors raised concerns in relation to rural towns being left feeling neglected and not having the support they need.
- Match funding was reported 50% but can be considered on a case by case basis.
- The responsibility was with the applicants to evidence and seek match funding, and it was recognised project management was a constraint, to ensure that delivery elements were in place.
- There were areas of deprivation across the Somerset, with specific areas needing to be picked out to focus on addressing this deprivation. This had been targeted in terms of need and hotspots of unemployment were

targeted with support. Deprivation in rural and coastal areas were covered in addition to this.

- There remain particular sectors of society that struggle with employment such as the disabled and elderly.
- It was considered how to encourage people to apply for this funding, to spread the message and ensure access and support is based in local areas asking those eligible to apply.
- It was confirmed that there were applications received from the Exmoor and for 2024/25. Work was ongoing to identify organisations to come forward where relevant.
- When there are examples of how funds would be used, it would become clearer around priorities in what we want to achieve from the fund.
- A Somerset wide initiative for larger organisations to be involved and for a larger scale case studies could make the scheme clearer in addressing needs across specific areas.

The Committee thanked officers for the presentation and noted the report, recognising the need for a member's workshop on these funds and economic development across Somerset.

37 Decision to award a contract for the provision of the Park & Ride Service in Taunton - Agenda Item 8

The Service Director for Infrastructure and Transport provided a report setting out the decision to award a contract for the provision of the Park and Ride service in Taunton.

During the debate the following comments and questions were raised:-

- It was considered if exploring the opportunity to introduce electric buses on this route would be suitable look at decarbonisation and meeting the Councils climate objectives.
- Government funding to pay for EV buses and has this been connected to procurement?
- The longer contract enabled the contractor to invest in own infrastructure. It was questioned if EV busses should have been looked at to enable investment.
- As part of the contract, it was considered to specify zero emissions vehicles. EV alternatives remained far more expensive than diesel vehicles, although Euro 6 engines were required. The length of contract enables some flexibility. Due to cost it was almost double the cost with EV buses than traditional diesel.
- The timing for the contract tender deadline didn't coincide with the Zebra EV Grant timescales. The Council is working with FirstGroup to submit a bid for

Zebra funding for other rural routes.

- There was a need for reliable buses when older buses are used, unreliability of older stock is an issue in the County.
- First came forward that they wanted Somerset to be a vanguard scheme for rural electric busses which would link with the Councils climate change objectives.
- Cheaper price of electric of over cost of diesel, meant the payback period was between 5-6 years. The whole life cost was still more expensive, hence the subsidy of 70% of the difference if the operator pays 30%.
- The service was extended as a request for later operating to avoid parking on site at Musgrove and in residential areas.
- Officers were thanked for the report and the Committee noted the recommendations.

The Scrutiny Committee considered and noted the recommendations being put to Executive on 6th December 2023, to award a contract on a 3+2+2 year basis for the delivery of the Taunton Park & Ride service, subject to sufficient funding being confirmed through Executive's consideration of the financial position also on 6th December 2023.

38 Climate & Place Budget Monitoring Position Month 5 - Agenda Item 9

The Head of Business Partnering for Finance presented the Climate and Place Budget Monitoring Position month 5.

During the debate the following comments and questions were raised:-

- The causes of the £800k climate overspend were questioned which included the costs incurred as a result of the pay award in the waste collection service.
- It was questioned if there were full year impacts or if these were part year impacts and if this could be provided in the next report.
- It was questioned if there was changes made to the budget of the cycle path going into Minehead. Members were reminded that this was a revenue report and the cycle path was a capital scheme from an external capital grant, from memory this wasn't overspent.
- Two building control teams had been integrated into one. A head of service had been appointed to manage the whole service and its performance, retaining market share in building control and improved monitoring income compared to previous years, fees had been increased in line with inflation although slightly less income was anticipated than in previous years as a result of industry demand.
- Highways costs for adverse weather and climate change were considered. There remained significant challenges with dry weather and increases in

potholes and road damage. Flood Damage has a high cost, such as the mudslides at Coombe Florey and subsequent cleanup.

- There were also statutory obligations to house due to flooding, increasing costs. Highways teams have responded but some roads had not been able to reopen due to impacts.
- It was recognised that due to the financial emergency service standards would likely reduce.
- The cost that the extreme weather events and repairing highways and assets was likely to increase, this was a long term problem faced.
- The committee thanked officers noted the budget update.

39 Action Tracker - Agenda Item 10

The Scrutiny Manager presented the item of the Action Tracker:-

- Three task and finish groups are being created, the energy plan meeting on 22nd November at 4pm, this will report back to the committee. Highways and Transport Task & Finish Group hasn't been set up yet. The meetings of the Future Transport Plan Working Group and Climate Strategy Refresh Working Group were working towards December but can't provide a specific date.
- There still remained an issue from Parish Councils in respect of highways comments and issues. A current focus of attention from LCN's are for highways workshops to address issues.
- Feedback was requested on task and finish groups and the timing of the formation of these.
- A Climate Development Plan Document was needed to be in place to address impacts of climate emergency.
- The Committee were informed that the tracker would capture what happens to the recommendation in the tracker and ongoing activity at a later date. An outcome of progress as a narrative on what comes next would be added.
- The Committee noted the tracker.

40 Forward Plan - Agenda Item 11

The Service Director for Infrastructure and Transport presented the Forward Plan.

- An update was requested in respect of water quality meeting in Somerset. This meeting needed to be rescheduled as a separate meeting in January and added to the forward plan and scheduled as a separate meeting in January. Communication would be sent as a form of words to clarify who will attend

and what this will address in respect of phosphate pollution of Ramsar sites and mitigation plans.

- Natural England had changed their stance on phosphates, allowing officers to expedite issues to get some clarity. There is a process of ongoing discussions and providing a right of response with Natural England and Council officers.
- All members of the committee were reminded that they can raise items with the chair and vice chair with future consideration.
- The Committee noted the forward plan.

(The meeting ended at Time Not Specified)

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CHAIR

Agenda item 4: Public Question Time

PQT No 1: Submitted by Cllr Nick Hall, Pilton Parish Council

Glastonbury Festival Traffic Management

Some members of our community here in Pilton, including myself, have raised a number of issues with the management of traffic associated with the Glastonbury Festival.

The 'advice' from Mendip District Council had been to direct issues to the Festival operating company, Glastonbury Festival Events Limited (GFEL). Unfortunately, most of the issues have not been addressed by GFEL.

Moreover there hasn't been any direct contact between Somerset Highways and our community, and so we don't know if these issues have in fact been discussed with Somerset Council?

Somerset Council did produce a 2023 Glastonbury Festival de-brief report for the Scrutiny Committee (Communities) but it specifically excluded the work activities undertaken by several Council departments including Highways. Highways (and traffic management) appear to be under the Terms of Reference for Scrutiny Committee (Climate and Places). Please can you confirm that highways and traffic issues related to Glastonbury Festival are within this committees' remit?

Is there a separate Somerset Council de-brief report on Traffic Management at the 2023 Glastonbury Festival? If so, does it include the issues that we have raised and a suitable action plan?

Presently this is no mechanism for Somerset Highways to interact directly with our community. If we feel GFEL are not addressing our concerns, how do we best raise our concerns without bothering the Scrutiny committee?

Substantive issues we would like to be addressed include:

Temporary Traffic Restrictions Order

There is insufficient consultation about closure of public roads and footpaths. I note that Somerset Council Terms and Conditions state that it

is the applicant's responsibility to consult with all those "potentially affected" by a road closure. "This includes Somerset Council members, Parish Councillors and businesses and residents". "A record of all those contacted should be kept.."

Cockmill Lane is closed despite residents lodging an interest in being consulted on its closure. Footpaths and bridleways are closed too far in advance of the Festival. We also note that the TTRO for 2023 came into force on 5 May 2023 but continued in force until Sunday 5 Nov 2023! How can a 3-day Festival require a six-month period of TTRO?

Potholes and large-scale road degradation

Many of the local roads around the Festival site are suffering from potholes and large scale degradation. This must be in some part due to the Festival traffic. I understand that public roads are for everyone's use but surely those making profits from overloading these roads need to contribute more? I understand that the quarries in Mendip have such a scheme?

Impact of external (or offsite) campsites:

The de-brief report concludes that additional Council resources are required to prevent nuisance from external (or offsite) campsites. The Committee should be aware that in many cases these are no longer just campsites but large-scale events with entertainment and bars. In recent years traffic from these activities, which apparently aren't part of the Festival, have grown. GFEL have failed to address the issue – what is Somerset highways going to do to address the matter?

Reducing the Traffic through Pilton village

The volume of traffic entering the village has increased. This is both a nuisance to the residents and increases concerns about security. The two main causes appear to be the inability of stewards to challenge vehicles and the expansion of the Green (or 'Village') car park. Pilton Parish Council has recently put forward some suggestions to GFEL but without the support of any highway experts. Surely this should be part of Somerset Highways Traffic Management Plan?

Strategic Traffic Management Plan

A condition of Planning Approval (2022/2458/FUL) was that a Strategic Traffic Management Plan shall be submitted and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority (in consultation [with] National Highways). Please can the Council advise the status of this Plan and if complete provide a copy?

Costs of Somerset Highways

Please can the Council confirm that GFEL pays Somerset Highways for their work associated with the Festival? How much was it in 2023? Does it cover the full cost of the department's work?

Finally I reiterate our simple request that we jointly seek efficient solutions to our community's concerns through proper dialogue.

PQT No. 1: Somerset Council response

We can confirm that highways and traffic issues related to Glastonbury festival are within this committees' remit, however no publicly available de-brief report is available as this has not been requested as it did not form part of the previous Mendip District Council de-brief report.

Somerset Council Traffic Management team are in regular dialogue throughout the year with the Glastonbury festival off-site traffic management team to discuss and agree the festivals traffic management plan. Following every festival, an off-site traffic de-brief meeting is held to ensure that any learning is captured and improvements incorporated for future years events. The community are free to contact the Council's traffic management events team at eventstm@somerset.gov.uk if they have any concerns regarding the festivals traffic management plan.

In response to the substantive issues raised within the document we can respond as follows: -

- Strategic Traffic Management plan- We can confirm that as yet this document has not been submitted to the Planning Authority to discharge this condition. Once the plan is submitted for consideration it will be placed on the planning portal which can be accessed by the public. When the document has been agreed then arrangements can be made for a copy to be provided to you.
- Costs of Somerset Highways – We can confirm that costs for the Traffic management plan, including the signing/lining/TRO's/VMS signs/temp signals etc, are funded and managed by the event organisers; the festival also pays for Somerset Council officer time in event control. There are therefore no Somerset Council costs associated with the traffic management/highways for this event, we would however, continue to provide a statutory service that ensure the safety of the travelling public; i.e fill potholes etc.
- The other issues raised will be forwarded to the traffic management events team for consideration and direct response.

Scrutiny Committee – Climate & Place - Outcome Tracker 2023 - 2024

Agenda items	Lead / Owner	Agreed Outcome	RAG Status
17 May 2023			
Approach to Climate and Place Scrutiny Committee	Jamie Jackson / Mickey Green	Members received a presentation on the principles of scrutiny and the approach being taken regarding scrutiny within the new Somerset Council, which would be reviewed after a year.	Awaiting Scrutiny Review 2024
Infrastructure and Transport: Highways Service Responsiveness Update	Mike O'Dowd- Jones	Members resolved to set up a task and finish group to review the Highways and Transport Services communication interfaces.	On Hold
Climate, Environment and Sustainability: EV Charging Update	Mike O'Dowd- Jones	The Committee was advised that the Council was looking at applying for additional funding from the Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) fund in order to run a small scale Egully trial. The Egully enables the on-street charging of residential vehicles, where people do not have their own driveways, without trailing wires across pavements etc. After the trial they would then report back and develop a strategy based upon their findings.	Awaiting progress report
19 July 2023			
Future Transport	Mike O'Dowd-Jones	The Committee was advised that with the Council had to have a new Local Plan and Local Transport Plan in place by 2025. Members resolved that a Local Transport Plan Task & Finish Group be set up.	On Hold
Climate, Sustainability and Environment – Next Steps	Kirsty Larkins	Members received a report setting out the next steps of the Council's strategic approach to Climate, Environment and Sustainability, to ensure that the Council was committed to reducing carbon emissions, achieving Net Zero and supporting nature's recovery. Members resolved that a Climate Strategy Refresh Task & Finish Group be set up.	On Hold
20th September 2023			
Task and Finish Group: Somerset Energy Plan	Kirsty Larkins	The Committee agreed to the request to set up a Somerset Energy Plan task and finish group which would be taking a fairly high-level approach to the subject.	Complete
Award of Contracts for highway	Mike O'Dowd-Jones	Members received details of the following 5 highways contracts that	Awaiting further

Scrutiny Committee – Climate & Place - Outcome Tracker 2023 - 2024

services		were to be considered by the Executive. A written response would be given on how long, under the contracts, a pot-hole repair would be guaranteed for.	information
Water Quality in Somerset	Kirsty Larkins	This item was withdrawn from the agenda and will be considered at a separate meeting, to be arranged.	Ongoing
22nd November 2023			
Uk Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural	Paul Hickson	The Service Manager for Economy presented a report which provided an update on the Shared and Rural Prosperity Fund for England. More information was requested in respect of the governance processes. The Impact of the fund distribution to communities would be covered in a fuller more detailed response.	Awaiting further information
Climate and Place Budget Monitoring Position Month 5	Christian Evans	The Head of Business Partnering for Finance presented the Climate and Place Budget Monitoring Position month 5. The causes of the £800k climate overspend were questioned which included the costs incurred as a result of the pay award in the waste collection service. It was questioned if there were full year impacts or if these were part year impacts and if this could be provided in the next report.	Awaiting further information

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Completed	Action complete and will be removed from tracker for next meeting
Pending	Action on-going or plans in place to address.
Incomplete	No action currently in place with a minimum of 3 months since action agreed.



Somerset Council
Climate and Place Scrutiny Committee
– 17 January 2024

National Devolution - Level 2 Devolution Deal position statement

Lead Officer: Paul Hickson
Executive Director: Mickey Green
Author: Sunita Mills
Contact Details: Sunita.Mills@somerset.gov.uk
Executive Lead Member:
Division / Local Member:

1. Summary

- 1.1.** The national picture for devolution has changed as part of the Autumn statement and now includes eligible councils across England that represent a whole county.
- 1.2.** This presents an opportunity for Somerset to start a national devolution journey and the Leader has written to the Secretary of State to express interest in developing a deal.
- 1.3.** It is understood that the initial offer will be a simple template approach, based on the Levelling Up White Paper with no scope for additional negotiations beyond it.
- 1.4.** Looking to the future, it is anticipated that this would be the first in a number of agreements that would increasingly transfer powers and funding to Somerset.

2. Issues for Consideration / Recommendations

- 2.1.** Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the update

3. Background

- 3.1.** National devolution involves the transfer of powers / functions and funding from national to local government. This is separate from the devolution of council services and funding to town / city / parish councils / community groups.
- 3.2.** For Somerset the journey of devolution will be key to delivering local ambitions and addressing our priorities, it could offer the longer-term opportunities of agreed levels of funding and flexibly to use it to meet our local needs.
- 3.3.** In February 2022, the Government published the Levelling Up White Paper. This set out a new devolution framework, that extended devolution beyond metropolitan areas for the first time. The framework sets out a flexible, three level approach to devolution recognising that a one-size fits all model would not be suitable, with different powers and functions for each devolution level.

Prior to this devolution deals had been made in eleven areas, nine of which were Mayoral Combined Authorities.

- 3.4.** The three levels set out in the devolution framework are:
- Level 3 – a single institution or County Council with a directly elected mayor (DEM), across a functional economic area (FEA) or whole county area;
 - Level 2 – A single institution or County Council without a DEM, across a FEA or whole county area;
 - Level 1 – Local authorities working together across a FEA or whole county area e.g. through a joint committee.
- 3.5.** In the 2023 Autumn Statement the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities announced a change in the pace of devolution to accelerate the level 2 deals, also known as county deals. This recent change means that there is no requirement for a directly elected mayor for Somerset to pursue devolution.
- 3.6.** At this stage devolution will be based around the geographic area covered by Somerset Council with no need to form partnerships with other authorities and can use our existing constitutional arrangements.
- 3.7.** For each level a different set of powers / functions can be pursued in a negotiation; the level 2 functions are –

Function	Detail
Strategic role in delivering services	Host for Government functions best delivered at a strategic level involving more than one local authority e.g. Local Nature Recovery Strategies
	Opportunity to pool services at a strategic level
	Opportunity to adopt innovative local proposals to deliver action on climate change and the UK's Net Zero targets
Local control of sustainable transport	Ability to introduce bus franchising
Investment spending	UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) planning and delivery at a strategic level
Giving adults the skills for the labour market	Devolution of Adult Education functions and the core Adult Education Budget
	Providing input into Local Skills Improvement Plans
Local control of infrastructure decisions	Homes England compulsory purchase powers (held concurrently)

- 3.8.** In response to the Autumn statement the Leader has written to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to express interest in working with government to secure a level 2 devolution agreement for Somerset. Somerset's MPs have also been informed of this intention.
- 3.9.** It's anticipated that devolution will feature in the manifestos of all the main parties at the general election. Pursuing a deal at this stage signals to the

current and future governments that Somerset is ready and willing to work with them to bring decision making closer to our communities in the longer term.

3.10. In the South West there may be future opportunities to work closer with other authorities, any agreement at this time doesn't preclude any future transfer of government powers / functions over the same or different geographies. The challenge of working with neighbouring authorities would be developing a coherent package of priorities that benefit all parties equally because of the inequalities, geographies and economic commonalities.

3.11. The next steps for Somerset level 2 devolution will be –
Engagement:

- Updates to Members
- Developing dialogue with MPs, business community, partners etc

Developing our proposal:

- Understand response from Secretary of State and work with government officials and the County Council's Network.
- Build on our story of place and agree key priorities and realistically ambitious asks that will become part of the longer term journey and potential future agreements.

Governance:

- Timetable formal governance and scrutiny once Government requirements are understood

4. Consultations Undertaken

4.1. None required at this stage.

5. Implications

5.1. At this stage there are no associated financial, equalities, health and wellbeing, climate change and sustainability or HR implications.

6. Background papers

6.1. None

Note: For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author

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Somerset Council
Scrutiny Committee
– 17/01/2024



Somerset Rivers Authority Draft Strategy and Flood Action Plan and March 2024
Executive Funding Decision

Lead Officer: Kirsty Larkins, Service Directors- Climate, Environment and Sustainability

Author: David Mitchell, Somerset Rivers Authority Manager

Contact Details: david.mitchell@somerset.gov.uk / 01823 356789

Executive Lead Member: Dixie Darch, Lead Member for Environment and Climate
Change

Division / Local Member: All

1. Summary

- 1.1.** 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 performed since 2015. Each year since the SRA's inception the Accountable Body has taken a Key Decision to confirm this role and approve passing through funds raised through Council Tax for the purposes of the Somerset Rivers Authority. Once approved this decision will ensure that the residents of Somerset continue to benefit from extra funding and extra actions that reduce the risks and impacts of flooding across the county. These extra activities are only possible because of the unique arrangements we have in Somerset to fund the Somerset Rivers Authority. Scrutiny Panel is asked to review and comment on the attached draft decision report. Not all information for the report is available at this time as it is subject to decisions by Somerset Council and the Somerset Rivers Authority Board e.g. February's Council budget setting meeting and SRA Board's decision on the draft 2024-25 Enhanced Programme.
- 1.2.** The creation of the Somerset Rivers Authority was a result of an action in the Somerset 20 Year Flood Action Plan (FAP). The FAP was produced in 2014 in response to the extensive flooding that occurred during the summer of 2012 and the winter of 2013-14. Since established the SRA has overseen delivery of the FAP. Many of the actions within the plan are now completed or in the process of being completed. 2024 is the 10-year anniversary of the floods in 2014. The Somerset Rivers Authority is in the process of developing a new Strategy and Flood Action Plan that will set the vision and objectives specifically for the Somerset Rivers Authority for the next 10 years and beyond. The final strategy and action plan is scheduled to be published in March 2024.

- 1.3.** The final strategy will provide a clear road map consisting of a set of guiding principles that defines actions that the SRA Partners and others should take (and not take) and the things the SRA should prioritise (and not prioritise) to achieve the desired goals and objectives. The document will explain the what, the why and the how of the SRA making it clear how the SRA is different from our Flood Risk Management Authority (FRMA) partners and set the parameters within which the SRA will provide grant funding. The Strategy and Flood Action Plan will enable the effective allocation of SRA resources and grant funding to accomplish SRA objectives. It will be:
- Specific to Somerset and specific to the SRA’s purpose
 - Focused on achieving the objectives.
 - Ambitious but achievable
- 1.4.** The Action Plan element of the strategy and action plan is under development. The action plan is being developed with the input of all SRA partner organisations. Feedback received from stakeholders and the public during the engagement process will also be considered as the plan is prepared.
- 1.5.** The work of the SRA addresses several of the priorities in the Somerset Council Plan and the “Vision” for Somerset Council. The vision states: “The new Somerset Council will build a fairer, greener, more flourishing, Somerset that cares for the most vulnerable and listens to you.” SRA activity delivers the priorities of: A Greener, more sustainable Somerset; and an environmentally sustainable and more resilient Somerset.
- 1.6.** Climate change is increasing the likelihood and impact of flooding. The work of the SRA helps Somerset prepare for, mitigate the impacts, become more resilient to and ultimately adapt to the impacts of climate change.

2. Issues for consideration / Recommendations

- 2.1.** Scrutiny Panel is asked to review and comment on the early draft of Executive Decision SRA funding decision report that will be considered on 6 March.
- 2.2.** Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider the draft SRA Strategy and provide feedback on its content

3. Background

- 3.1.** The SRA was set up as a partnership between different Flood Risk Management Authorities (FRMAs) because different parts of Somerset have different flooding problems. Organisations are limited in what they can do individually, but working together as SRA partners they have achieved a great deal more than would otherwise have been possible. Current partners in the SRA are Somerset Council, the Environment Agency, Natural England, the Wessex Regional Flood and Coastal Committee, the Parrett and Axe Brue

Internal Drainage Boards and Wessex Water. Somerset Council has 6 councillor representatives on the SRA Board, including the Executive Lead Member for Climate and Environment.

- 3.2.** For its first full year of work in 2015-16, the SRA had £2.7million of what was called Interim Funding from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), Somerset’s local authorities and the Parrett and Axe Brue Internal Drainage Boards. For 2016-17, and every year since, Somerset’s local authorities have been allowed by the Government to raise money purely for the SRA through what is technically known as an Alternative Notional Amount (ANA) of 1.25% of 2016-17 council tax. Because the SRA has had this unique extra funding stream, for its mission of doing extra flood protection and resilience work, councils have not had to divert funding from any other services for the SRA. The level of the charge made for the SRA has not increased since 2016-17. The total amount raised for the SRA has increased from £2.7million in 2016-17 to an anticipated £3.058million for 2024-25, but that is only because the number of households in Somerset has increased.
- 3.3.** The Somerset Rivers Authority was hosted by Somerset County Council from its inception. Somerset Council has taken on the role of Host Authority and Accountable Body. The SRA is an unincorporated association and as such has no legal status. All legal, financial and employment matters related to the raising and spending of SRA funds are through Somerset Council.
- 3.4.** The SRA is not a Risk Management Authority (RMA) as defined in the Flood and Water Management Act (FWMA) 2010. Somerset County Council (which is the Lead Local Flood Authority), the Environment Agency, Internal Drainage Boards, district councils and Wessex Water are designated as RMAs. RMAs have statutory functions, duties and powers set out in the FWMA that enable them to fulfil their various functions.

4. Consultations undertaken

- 4.1.** The new strategy and action plan has been under development for over 18 months. Consultation has been undertaken with all the partner organisations that make up the SRA and with stakeholders and the public over this period. This feedback shaped the draft document that has been provided for comment.
- 4.2.** Between 17th November 2023 and 14 January 2024, the public and stakeholders were encouraged to visit the website www.srastrategy.co.uk to have their say on the draft strategy and contribute towards the developing action plan. The website was promoted through SRA social media, SRA partner social media, local press and direct communications with stakeholders. The website was also promoted through the Somerset Library network. Somerset Councillors were emailed about the website on 24/11/2023. Town and Parish

Clerks were also contacted to help raise awareness. Many other stakeholders were contacted directly.

- 4.3.** The website received approximately 6,500 visits. Unfortunately, whilst the website received a good number of visits the number of visitors that answered the survey questions was low with less than 100 surveys completed. Feedback that was received was positive and generally agreed with what the SRA proposed within the strategy. Visitors to the website were also able to report their flood related concerns by adding information onto a map. There have been over 125 issues added from all across the county.
- 4.4.** 2 public and 2 stakeholder online workshop were held on the 8th and 9th of January. Feedback from these workshops was not available at the time of publication of this report.
- 4.5.** Feedback received through recent engagement period will be analysed, considered and reported to the SRA Board. The Board will consider whether amendments to the draft strategy and flood action plan are required before publication.

5. Implications

- 5.1.** The Somerset Rivers Authority is an unincorporated association. The SRA's strategy and flood action plan will not be a statutory document and as such there are no major implications associated with the publication of the strategy and plan.
- 5.2.** The strategy and plan will be important documents shaping the work of the SRA as a partnership in the future. SRA activities are overseen by a 13-person Board made of representatives of the SRA partnership organisations. 6 Somerset Councillors sit on the SRA Board including the Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change. Any matters associated with spending SRA funds will be subject to the SRA's established governance and decision-making processes and will also follow Somerset Council's financial and governance regulations as the Accountable Body.
- 5.3.** As SRA funding is raised through Council Tax and Somerset Council is the Host Authority and Accountable Body for the SRA a Key Decision is required each year to approve passing through of SRA funds for SRA activities. The Executive will receive a detailed report on 6 March which will set out the SRA's budget and planned programme of works for 2024-25. A draft of this report will be shared with the Scrutiny Committee.
- 5.4.** Equalities Implications: The new Strategy will set the strategic direction for the SRA's approach to reducing the risks and impacts of flooding across Somerset.

The strategy will apply county wide. The strategy will ensure that the SRA invests the funding it has in projects that deliver an extra level of activities to reduce flood risks. The SRA provides grant funding to the SRA partners and others that then deliver projects. Organisations in receipt of SRA grant funding are expected to assess whether equalities impact assessments are required for individual projects. Equalities implications in relation to the funding and governance of the SRA will be considered in detail as part of the Executive Decision on 6 March 2024.

- 5.5.** Legal Implications: no legal implications associated with this report.
Human Resources: no HR implications associated with this report.
Community Safety: no implications associated with this report.
Health & Wellbeing Implications: no implications associated with this report.
Social Value Implications: no implications associated with this report

6. Background papers

- 6.1.** Appendix 1 DRAFT Executive Decision report and Appendices in relation to Somerset Council's role as Host Authority and Accountable Body to the Somerset Rivers Authority partnership.
Appendix 1a DRAFT 2025-25 SRA Memorandum of Understanding and Constitution V1
Appendix 2 DRAFT SRA Strategy and Flood Action Plan 2024 – 2034
Appendix 3 DRAFT SRA Strategy and Flood Action Plan 2024 – 2034 Survey Questions

Note For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author

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Decision Report - Executive Decision

Forward Plan Reference: FP/23/--/--

Decision Date - 06/03/2024

Key Decision - yes

Confidential Information - appendix



Report Title: Executive Decisions in relation to Somerset Council's role as Host Authority and Accountable Body to the Somerset Rivers Authority partnership.

Executive Member(s): Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change

Local Member(s) and Division:

Lead Officer: Kirsty Larkins, Service Directors- Climate, Environment and Sustainability

Author: David Mitchell, Somerset Rivers Authority Manager

Contact Details: david.mitchell@somerset.gov.uk / 01823 356789

Summary / Background

1. Somerset Council took on the role of Host Authority and Accountable Body for the Somerset Rivers Authority in 2023; carrying on the role that Somerset County Council 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 risks and impacts of flooding across the county. These extra activities are only possible because of the unique arrangements we have in Somerset to fund the Somerset Rivers Authority.
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 Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) was launched in January 2015 to provide an extra level of flood protection and resilience for Somerset. Through the SRA an additional £25.9m has already been raised to reduce the frequency depth and duration of flooding and increase resilience to flooding across the county. 2024-25 will be the ninth year that the SRA funds an 'Enhanced Programme' of projects to tackle flood risk
3. Somerset is unique in having the SRA and the ability to raise funds in the way it does. The SRA is currently a partnership of Somerset Council, the Environment

Agency, Axe Brue Internal Drainage Board, Parrett Internal Drainage Board, Wessex Regional Flood and Coastal Committee, Natural England and Wessex Water.

4. In 2024-25, a further £3,079,000¹ will be raised locally and spent on XX different projects and activities. SRA activities stretch across the county. Full details are provided in Appendix 3 and 4.
5. As Somerset County Council was the accountable body for the Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) for the last eight years a key-decision was been taken each year to approve the allocation of funds, raised through an alternative notional amount on Council Tax and contributions from Somerset Internal Drainage Boards for use in the coming financial year. This Executive is being asked to take the decision on behalf of the Somerset Council.
6. 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 ensured funding the SRA did not reduce funding for other services. This ANA is rolled forward each year to fund the SRA. The amount charged is currently fixed at 1.25% of the 2016/17 council tax charge. For 2024-25 the charge per band D property will be £14.65, resulting in approximately £3.059m being raised for the SRA.
7. The purpose of funding raised for the SRA is to deliver an extra level of flood protection and resilience to Somerset residents using locally raised funding to deliver on locally agreed priorities. The SRA Board each year approves a series of projects which are collectively referred to as the Enhanced Programme. Since 2015 the SRA Board has approved funding for approximately 240 schemes and activities. The 2024-25 Enhanced Programme will see a further XX separate projects funded; full details contained in Appendix 3 (confidential) and 4 public).
8. The Executive is asked to review the 2024-25 SRA Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and approve the signing of the current MoU by the Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change.
9. The Somerset Rivers Authority partnership has been developing a new strategy and action plan during 2023-24. The strategy follows on from the 20 Year Flood Action Plan (FAP) that was produced in 2014 in response to the floods of that

¹ Includes £10,000 from the Axe Brue Internal Drainage Board and £10,000 from the Parrett Internal Drainage Board.

year. Many actions in the FAP are now completed. The SRA's new Strategy and Flood Action Plan will set the strategic direction of the SRA partnership for the next ten years and beyond. There are 6 Somerset Councillors on the SRA Board who have been involved in the development of the strategy. The Executive is asked to review the final draft of the document in advance of the SRA Board publishing the document on the 8th of March.

Recommendations

10. The Executive agrees

- a. To Somerset Council continuing in the role of Host Authority and Accountable Body for the Somerset Rivers Authority.
- b. To review the revised Local Memorandum of Understanding (including the Constitution of the SRA) set out in Appendix 1 and authorise the Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change to sign this on behalf of Somerset Council.
- c. To review the proposed SRA Budget and SRA Enhanced Programme for 2024-25, (Appendix X ITEM XX 2024-25 Enhanced Programme and Budget) in accordance with the recommendations to the SRA Board at its meeting on the 8th of March 2023.
- d. To the release of funding committed from all sources in 2024-25 for the purposes of the SRA, subject to receipt of those funds, in accordance with the budget for 2024-25 as set out in item C above.
- e. That Somerset Councillors that sit on the SRA Board can approve the publication of the SRA's new Strategy and Flood Action Plan at the SRA Board meeting on 8 March 2024.
- f. That the detailed management of the 2024-25 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.
- g. The case (set out in 'legal implications' for exempt information) for Appendix 3_ CONFIDENTIAL_2024-25 SRA Enhanced Programme scheme descriptions WITH COSTS to be treated in confidence, as the case for the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing that information.

- h. To exclude the press and public from the meeting where there is any discussion at the meeting regarding exempt or confidential information (Appendix 3).

Reasons for recommendations

11. Somerset Council is the accountable legal body for the Somerset Rivers Authority until such time as it becomes a separate legal entity. The recommendations, once approved, will confirm Somerset Council as the accountable legal body for the Somerset Rivers Authority. This will enable the SRA to continue to work with partners to deliver the actions within the agreed Somerset Flood Action Plan, leading to an enhanced level of flood protection and resilience in the county.
12. The majority of the £3,059,000 funding raised will be used to fund enhanced programme activities with the remainder (£300,000) covering SRA staff costs, overheads and running costs. The 2024-25 Enhanced Programme will consist of XX different projects aimed at reducing flood risk, increasing resilience to flooding and encouraging adaptation to the water related impacts of climate change across Somerset. Full details are contained within Appendix 4.
13. The allocation of funding to specific projects within the 2024-25 Enhanced Programme is proposed, if required, to be considered in exempt session to avoid compromising the procurement position of the delivery partners (Appendix 3).
14. The Local Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and Constitution which set the context for the work of the SRA has been revised to reflect changes relevant to 2024-25.
15. The MOU must be formally agreed by all Partners to ensure the ongoing support of Partners in delivering the SRA Enhanced Programme of work and provide a clear governance structure for setting and managing 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 County Council by the Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change.

Other options considered

16. The only alternative option is for Somerset Council not to take on the role of the host authority 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.

Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan

17. SRA schemes and projects support the priorities of Somerset Council. The SRA is also reviewing Somerset's 20 Year Flood Action Plan.

18. The work of the SRA addresses a number 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."

SRA activity delivers against the priorities of:

- A Greener, more sustainable Somerset
- An environmentally sustainable and more resilient Somerset

Climate change is increasing the likelihood and impacts of flooding. The work of the SRA helps Somerset prepare for, mitigate the impacts, become more resilient to and ultimately adapt to the impacts of climate change

19. 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. Through delivering the Somerset 20 Year Flood Action Plan, the SRA partners undertake projects and activities that contribute towards tackling many of the climate change related risks identified in the Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy.
20. The work of the SRA directly supports the objectives contained within Somerset County Councils Local Flood Risk Management Strategy.
21. Medium Term Financial **Plan: It was resolved** at Full Council on the 20th of February 2024 to agree to set a Council Tax precept of £14.65 (Band D) within

the base budget for the Somerset Rivers Authority. This results in a Council Tax Requirement of £3,058,886. As explained in paragraph 6 SRA funding does not impact on council tax funds available for other council services.

Financial and Risk Implications

22. Funding amounting to £3,586,626 is available to the SRA for 2024-25, of which Somerset Council will contribute £3,058,886 from Council Tax receipts (as confirmed at the Full Council meeting on the 20th of February 2024). Funds raised for use by the SRA do not reduce the funds available to Somerset Council through council tax.
23. SRA funding is raised by a 1.25% 'alternative notional amount' (ANA) added to council tax bills. The funds raised are in addition to that raised for core SCC 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
24. 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 will be managed through Somerset Council and 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 the decision of the SRA Board.
25. The flexibility afforded to Somerset's current local authorities to raise a 'shadow precept' through council tax for funding of SRA activities will continue for as long as the new Somerset Council chooses to raise it.
26. The primary risk of not approving the SRA funding and Enhanced Programme would be that the SRA could ultimately be wound up. Without funding the SRA would be unable to deliver its objective of an extra level of protection from flooding and an increase in resilience to flooding. The momentum achieved since the SRA's inception in 2015 in mitigating the intensity and duration of flooding events will not be maintained.
27. There is a risk of reputational damage to Somerset Council if funding is not approved and the SRA ceases to continue in any meaningful form.

28. If funding is not approved there is a risk of (4) staff redundancies within the SRA team and a potential financial liability for Somerset Council from redundancy payments. This is mitigated by the agreement to use any remaining SRA funds to settle this liability in the first instance.
29. The SRA provides grant funding, paid in arrears, to SRA delivery partners upon evidence of agreed and eligible works being completed. 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 financial officer from the delivery organisation giving the SRA assurance that any claim is for eligible spend. This process minimises the risk of funds being spent on ineligible activity. The SRA undertakes an audit annually of selected claims to provide an additional level of assurance that SRA funds are being spent for the intended purpose.
30. Just as some projects underspend, so 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. This approval process allows the SRA Board to consider funding requests in advance of committing to those cost increases and allows the Board to manage its available funds in a prudent manner and to consider any impacts on the overall Enhanced Programme and budget. Where a cost increase occurs that could not be identified in advance, the SRA Board has the option to not fund that cost increase and the delivery partner would be liable for that cost. Any decision taken by the SRA Board must also follow council Standing Orders and, where necessary, a key or non-key decision will be taken to ratify the SRA Board decision.
31. The Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) granted £13.049m to 'Somerset Flooding' project in 2015. These LEP funds are now fully claimed. Project delivery is still underway using match funding. There is a risk that the LEP could claw back previously granted funds if a project was not completed or it was found that the funds had been incorrectly spent. This is mitigated by the SRA claims procedure which requires any partner claim to be certified by a suitably qualified finance officer or other senior officer of the organisation claiming and also by annual auditing procedures.

32. Somerset County Council agreed to ‘own’ the risks associated with spending of LEP funding on behalf of the SRA. This commitment will pass to the new council. This risk is mitigated by the fact that SCC has signed ‘strategic grant agreements’ with the 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.
33. Due to the measures and procedures set out above, financial risk to Somerset Council as Host Authority and Accountable Body for 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 budget. The likelihood and impact of the above risks coming to fruition have been assessed as having a low likelihood but a high impact.

Please enter risk description					
Risk that Somerset Council is liable for any cost associated with the winding up of the SRA or of SRA grant funded projects going over budget.					
Likelihood	2	Impact	4	Risk Score	8
Please enter mitigation here					
The SRA has clear governance and decision making processes that minimise the risk that costs associated with SRA grant funded projects will exceed the available SRA funds.					

Legal Implications

34. 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.
35. The amendments to the SRA’s memorandum of understanding and constitution do not carry any legal implications for Somerset Council or any of the SRA

partners. The MoU confirms organisational support for the SRA and codifies the governance arrangements for the proper operation of the SRA Board.

36. Appendix 3 contains exempt information. “Exempt information” is defined by Section 100 of the Local Government Act 1972 and by Schedule 12A to that Act. The information in Appendix 3 is exempt information because it is considered to fall within paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A:

“Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)”.

The public interest test is then applied and in this instance it is considered that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information for the reasons set out in paragraph 1.3 in the Background section below.

HR Implications

37. Somerset Council will act on behalf of the SRA Board as Host Authority. It will employ SRA staff (x4). As such Somerset Council will be responsible for all HR related matters for the SRA team.

Other Implications:

Equalities Implications

15. You need to show within this section that you have shown due regard to the implications detailed below. If the implications detailed below are not directly applicable to your proposed decision, you still need to explain why they are not applicable and have not been considered. The implications you must show due regard for are: - Access - Equality and Diversity - Human Rights. An Equalities Impact Assessment must be completed for all decisions – unless the Equalities Manager has agreed otherwise. www.somerset.gov.uk/impactassessment

The Equalities Impact Assessment needs to be appended to this report and referenced in this section. If there are no implications then please state so under this heading.

38. This decision relates purely 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 the 'SRA shadow precept' for the activities of the SRA as set out within the SRA's Enhanced Programme.

39. Equalities and due regard issues have been considered. Project specific due regard issues will be considered on a project by project basis. The SCC Lead Equalities Officer has confirmed a full equalities impact assessment is not required for this decision - TBC.
40. The SRA Enhanced Programme of works is a series of mostly relatively small-scale interventions related to flood risk management. The work often has very localised impacts and is developed in consultation with landowners, property owners and statutory bodies such as Lead Local Flood Authority, Environment Agency and Natural England.
41. Where community-based work is undertaken as part of the Programme, such as building community resilience, these will be undertaken in an inclusive manner with reference to Somerset Council standards on publications and communication.
42. Representation of the communities of Somerset, and their various characteristics, will be achieved through councillor representation on the SRA Board. SRA projects often involve stakeholder groups from across Somerset. The SRA funds community engagement officers that work in communities at risk of flooding across Somerset. SRA meetings are public meetings.
43. The local Memorandum of Understanding sets out that the SRA shall, where relevant and unless otherwise agreed, operate in accordance with Somerset County Council practices and procedures, relating to:
 - Equalities policies.
 - Policies for dealing with access to information and data protection.

Community Safety Implications

44. There are no implications with regard to crime, but the aim of the funding is to improve community safety by reducing risks associated with flooding

Climate Change and Sustainability Implications

45. The aim of setting up the SRA is to provide a long-term sustainable funding solution to enhance flood risk management in the county. The SRA will directly

support Somerset Council to respond to the challenges of climate change. SRA funds will invest in projects that will support adaptation to climate change and help communities and businesses be resilient and sustainable into the future. Many SRA funded projects deliver multiple benefits such as water quality, carbon sequestration etc. SRA projects will directly support delivery of the Climate Emergency Strategy.

46. SRA grant proposal forms expressly require proposers to say how their project will help tackle climate change. The proposal form states:

Addressing Climate Emergency: The SRA encourages proposals which directly support Somerset's response to climate change by increasing resilience and encouraging adaptation to the effects of climate change. Please pay particular attention to the Water Sector Detailed Report (Appendix 12). Describe to what extent your proposal supports Somerset in achieving its goals of carbon neutrality and/or long-term resilience to the impact of climate change. Such as:

- Carbon reduction and energy conservation
- Support biodiversity and ecological adaptation and resilience
- Flood risk management through nature-based solutions
- Implementation of water conservation measures inc agriculture, homes, business and industry
- Mitigation of environmental impacts
- Strategies to raise awareness and preparedness involving our communities

Health and Safety Implications

47. None identified.

Health and Wellbeing Implications

48. The aim of the Programme as a whole is to improve community well-being. There are specific actions in the Programme that are aimed at improving community resilience. The health and wellbeing of residents potentially impacted by flooding is improved through increasing resilience to flooding and protection from flooding.

Social Value

49. 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 into the future. SRA funds support community resilience 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.

Scrutiny comments / recommendations:

50. TBC

Background

51. 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; it was an Action in Somerset's 20 Year Flood Action Plan (FAP) drawn up at the Government's request in 2014 to reduce the severity, duration, frequency and impact of flooding.
52. The SRA is a partnership of existing Flood Risk Management Authorities (FRMAs). Its members are currently Somerset Council, the Environment Agency, Natural England, the Wessex Regional Flood & Coastal Committee, the Axe-Brue IDB and the Parrett IDB and Wessex Water. The SRA does not diminish the roles, funding and responsibilities of any of its Flood Risk Management partners - nor indeed of landowners (who have their own riparian responsibilities). Somerset Council will appoints 6 council representatives to the SRA Board.
53. Through the SRA, additional work is undertaken with increased coordination. The aim is to ensure that Somerset residents benefit from organisations' collective experience and knowledge. The SRA does extra, not instead of. It delivers an extra level of flood protection and resilience for the whole of Somerset. It raises extra money. It enables extra work.
54. The Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2024/25 to 2027/28 for Somerset Council was considered by Full Somerset County Council on 20th February 2024. The Council resolved to continue the Council Tax precept of £14.65 within the base budget for the Somerset Rivers Authority). This results in a Council Tax requirement of £3,058,886 as detailed in paper X, appendix XX of

Item XX, Budget, Medium Term Financial Plan and Council Tax Setting. The outcomes of that meeting can be found by visiting the Somerset Council website -Full Council Agenda and Decisions. This funding, committed by Somerset County Council on behalf of Somerset Council, plus £10,000 from the two Somerset Drainage Boards totals £3,078,886 and is ring-fenced to finance the SRA in 2024-25, its 10th financial year. The SRA budget will have a neutral impact on Somerset Council's own budget. **TO BE CONFIRMED / UPDATED FOLLOWING COUNCIL MEETING.**

55. This local funding will deliver a range of flood risk management activities across all areas of Somerset as part of the SRA Enhanced Programme. Appendix 3 of this report gives details of the projects with costs. Appendix 4 has project details without costs for the public. Appendix 3 is confidential to avoid compromising commercial negotiations with contractors when tenders are published for project delivery by grant recipients.
56. The Scheme of Delegation referenced in the SRA Constitution will be met by adherence to the Somerset Council constitutional arrangements and schemes of delegation. This is appropriate given that Somerset Council will be the accountable body, and the SRA in its current form lacks status as a decision-making body. Appendix 6 of the SRA Constitution (contained within Appendix 1 of this report) outlines the SRA decision making processes and reflects that these decisions are decisions 'in principle' and are subject to formal approval by its host authority and the accountable body for all SRA funding.
57. The proposed budget, and associated SRA Enhanced Programme was approved by the SRA Board on 4th of March 2023.

Background Papers

None

Appendices

- Appendix 1 DRAFT SRA 2024-25 Memorandum of Understanding and Constitution
- Appendix 2 DRAFT SRA Board paper 2024-25 Enhanced Programme and Budget - NOT YET AVAILABLE
- Appendix 3_ CONFIDENTIAL_2024-25 SRA Enhanced Programme scheme descriptions WITH COSTS - NOT YET AVAILABLE

- Appendix 4 2024-25-SRA Enhanced Programme scheme descriptions - **NOT YET AVAILABLE**

Assurance checklist (if appropriate)

	Officer Name	Date Completed
Legal & Governance Implications	David Clark	TBC
Communications	Peter Elliott	TBC
Finance & Procurement	Nicola Hix	TBC
Workforce	Alyn Jones	TBC
Asset Management	Oliver Woodhams	TBC
Executive Director / Senior Manager		TBC
Strategy & Performance	Alyn Jones	TBC
Executive Lead Member		TBC
Consulted:	Councillor Name	TBC
Local Division Members		
Opposition Spokesperson		TBC
Scrutiny Chair		TBC

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2024-25 Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Local Memorandum of Understanding & Constitution

1. Background and Context

1.1 The Parties

Somerset Council (SC), the Axe Brue and the Parrett Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs), the Environment Agency, Natural England, the 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.

1.2 The Somerset Flood Action Plan

The Parties, together with Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) - formerly MHCLG - 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 (*Appendix One*). 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.

1.3 Memorandum of Understanding 8 December 2014 and sustainable funding mechanism

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 DLUHC 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.

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 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.

The 1.25% is fixed at 2016-17 levels. The 1.25% remains in the Council Tax base year on year as long it is raised for the purpose originally intended.

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 2025. 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 2024 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 2025.

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 June 2023. Those arrangements will be superseded by the arrangements put in place under this Local MoU.

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

Date

Signed by **Tony Bradford** for
and 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 **Emma Baker** for
and on behalf of the
Environment Agency

Date

Signed by Cllr **Michael
Caswell** as a representative of
Somerset Council

Date

Signed by **Jeff Fear** for
and 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** for
and on behalf of **Natural
England**

Date

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

Date

Signed by Cllr **Dixie Darch** for
and on behalf of **Somerset
Council**

Date

Signed by **Cllr Simon Coles** 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.

2.2.2 To provide a strategic overview of the continued delivery of the Somerset Flood Action Plan, and Flood Risk and Water Level Management in Somerset.

2.2.3 To provide a public forum and single point of contact for collective decision-making in respect of Flood Risk and Water Level Management in Somerset.

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 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 enable 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.

2.2.6 To undertake the detailed planning and, with government, put in place the necessary arrangements for the establishment of the SRA as a precepting body.

2.2.7 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 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.

2.3.4 The SRA prepares an annual Enhanced Programme detailing the additional work outlined in 2.2.4. The SRA commissions the delivery of such actions, details of which in respect of the 2022-23 Enhanced Programme, can be found in Appendix Three.

2.3.5 The SRA co-ordinates the implementation of the Somerset Flood Action Plan whose outstanding actions are contained in either the Somerset Common Works Programme or the Enhanced Programme.

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

2.3.7 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.

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

2.3.9 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 Funding totalling £3,078,886 (TBC) will be available to the SRA for 2024-25, raised by Somerset Council and the Parrett and Axe Brue IDBs as follows:

Authority	Contribution
Somerset Council	£3,058,886
Somerset Internal Drainage Boards	£20,000
Total	£3,078,886

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, SC 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 2024-25 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 SC to meet agreed expenditure incurred by another Party.

2.7.4 SC 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 SC 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 supporting the delivery of the Vision and the Flood Action Plan to be carried out by the Parties
- Determine the scope of services provided by SC as Host 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 5 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 Flood Action Plan, 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 and the outstanding actions of the Flood Action Plan. Their terms of reference are set out in Appendix Four and members of the SRA Management 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 Service Manager
- Vicky Farwig, Wessex Water (TBC)

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.

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
- DLUHC Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
- 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 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.

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 overall progress and exploring in more detail where delivery/progress is flagged red (using a RAG status)
 - 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 Service Manager

The Group will meet as required, but no more than monthly. A meeting quorum is a minimum of 6 members (or nominated substitutes) including the accountable body and two other funding organisations.

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 SRA partners and associated bodies (such as Farming & Wildlife Group SouthWest and Wessex Water) 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
 - 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
- 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

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:

- Environment Agency
- Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium
- Somerset Council – (Lead Local Flood Authority and Highways)
- Wessex Water
- Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group SouthWest
- Natural England
- Somerset Catchment Partnership

SRA Technical Group meets every 6 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

SRA decision-making processes

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 (SC), which makes the necessary formal decisions with regard to programmes of work and spend according to the SC decision making processes including the SC 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 SC'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 SC's own code of conduct or.

SRA Delegations

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

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.

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.

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

1. 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 £500,000.
2. 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.
3. Cost increases to individual works in SRA Enhanced Programmes. Tolerance up to £500,000 or 30% of the original budget for that 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 6 Flood Action Plan flood risk management 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 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 the six Flood Action Plan objectives, to determine the relative importance of different types and scales of need, flood risk management work and different benefits/dis benefits



**Somerset
Rivers Authority**

**DRAFT SRA Strategy
and Flood Action Plan
2024 - 2034**

*We reduce the risks and impacts of
flooding across Somerset*

Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) is a unique partnership

Our partners work together to achieve more for Somerset



Our core purpose is to reduce the risks and impacts of flooding

Executive Summary

Somerset Rivers Authority's core purpose as a partnership is to reduce the risks and impacts of flooding across Somerset. That is what we do.

Our partners are Somerset Council, the Parrett and Axe Brue Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs), the Environment Agency, Natural England, the Wessex Regional Flood & Coastal Committee and Wessex Water.

The idea for Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) arose during the winter floods of 2013-14, the wettest winter for 250 years. Around 150km² of the Somerset Levels were submerged for weeks: 165 homes were flooded, 7,000 businesses affected, 81 roads closed. The cost to Somerset was up to £147.5 million.

During this flood, a range of organisations from across Somerset pulled together a 20 Year Flood Action Plan. One of this Plan's main recommendations was that a partnership should be set up to improve local water management. Somerset Rivers Authority was duly launched in January 2015.

Our partners work together as the SRA to achieve more than it would be possible for them to achieve individually. SRA membership enables our partners to go above and beyond what they usually do, to carry out additional schemes and activities, to do extra work on local priorities.

So that more can be done, annual funding is raised through council tax solely for the use of the SRA. We get around £3million a year through council tax. The IDBs give another £20,000.

We've drafted this new Strategy to shape how we spend this money across Somerset. It includes lessons learned from the SRA's own history, from Somerset flooding and the intensifying impacts of climate change. We have studied partners' own plans and strategies, held extensive talks with partners, and listened to the desires and frustrations expressed by residents, businesses and stakeholders across Somerset.

Accordingly, themes flowing through the SRA's Strategy are:

- **Working with communities**
- **Strengthening operations, boosting maintenance**
- **Building resilience, encouraging adaptation**
- **Protecting the economy from flooding**
- **Conserving and enhancing the special environments of Somerset**

What gives SRA works their own distinctive fingerprint is the combination of these themes.

Our core purpose, principles and themes are encapsulated in the following objectives. Between 2024 and 2034, we will develop and fund selected schemes and activities that advance these objectives:

1. Reduce the risks and impacts of flooding across Somerset.
2. Maintain access and connections during times of flood for communities and businesses across Somerset.
3. Increase the resilience of people, places and the environment to flooding, while adapting to climate change.
4. Protect Somerset's economy from the impacts of flooding, promote business confidence and encourage new opportunities.
5. While doing the above, conserve and enhance Somerset's special environments (natural, built, social, cultural) for all who live and work in Somerset and visit.

The SRA will take a catchment-based approach towards fulfilling these objectives. A catchment is an area of land from which water - especially rainwater - drains and flows down into streams, rivers, lakes and often the sea.

We will analyse catchments to understand problems with excessive amounts of flood water and we will select issues about which the SRA can do most in line with our objectives.

Approaches will be taken which balance investment between upper, mid and lower catchment areas, and combine different measures.

We will fund proposals which reduce the risks and impacts of flooding, and benefit Somerset people and places in as many ways as possible.

Contents

1. Why this SRA Strategy and Flood Action Plan is needed
2. SRA partners
3. SRA funding
4. SRA history 2014-23
5. The context now: Somerset flooding and climate change
6. Lessons learned from SRA works so far
7. SRA core purpose and core principles
8. SRA themes
9. SRA objectives
10. How is this SRA Strategy and Flood Action Plan going to be delivered?
11. Flood Action Plan

1

Why this SRA Strategy and Flood Action Plan is needed



Somerset has suffered many significant floods over the centuries. The wettest winter for 250 years was the winter of 2013-14. Around 150km² of the Somerset Levels were submerged for weeks: 165 homes were flooded, 7,000 businesses affected, 81 roads closed. The cost to Somerset was estimated as being up to £147.5 million.

During this flood, Somerset partners pulled together a 20 Year Flood Action Plan. One of this Plan's main recommendations was that a partnership should be set up to improve local water management. Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) grew out of this Plan and we now oversee it.

Much has been achieved. Between the SRA's official launch in January 2015 and April 2023, we allocated an extra £26million of SRA funding – and £13million of Growth Deal funding from the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership for works to reduce the risks and impacts of flooding. Hundreds of schemes and activities have been completed across Somerset.

A lot has also changed since 2014. More works of different kinds now need to be done, with people and places joining together to tackle varying problems with flooding across Somerset and to look to the future. With climate change expected to bring more intense floods to towns, villages and landscapes across the county, worse than those already being experienced now, people and places need to be prepared.

Ten years on, the time has come for an updated Plan, crafted specifically for the SRA, that draws upon the experiences of the last decade, and continues to serve the people of Somerset well.



2

SRA partners

Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) is a partnership, launched in January 2015 after the devastating floods of 2013-14. Our partners are Somerset Council, the Parrett and Axe Brue Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs), the Environment Agency, Natural England, the Wessex Regional Flood & Coastal Committee (WRFCC), and Wessex Water. Representatives of all these bodies sit on the SRA Board. The Board directs the SRA and approves budgets and programmes of work.

Our partners work together through the SRA to achieve more than it would be possible for them to achieve individually. Partners' own flood risk and water management responsibilities continue. **SRA membership enables partners to go above and beyond what they usually do**, to carry out additional schemes and activities.

We have also worked with many other organisations and groups, most notably the Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group SouthWest (FWAG SW) on the award-winning Hills to Levels project, which helps to slow the flow of water down to vulnerable areas.

In the years to come, as part of the implementation of this Strategy, we expect and want to work with many more different organisations, communities, businesses and individuals.

Pictured at the top of this page, works on the River Frome in Frome town centre.

3

SRA funding

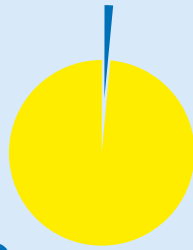
SRA income from council tax

2016-17

£2,757,000

2023-24

£3,010,000 +9.2%



So that Somerset Rivers Authority partners have money to achieve more, annual funding is raised through council tax solely for the use of the SRA.

In December 2015, the government gave Somerset County Council and the five district councils that then existed the power to raise for the SRA an additional amount of money equating to 1.25% of these councils' 2016-17 total council tax charges. In 2016-17, the amount raised in this way for us was £2.757 million.

The power to raise funds for the SRA has since passed to the single new Somerset Council launched in April 2023. The percentage is still the same as it was - 1.25% of the 2016-17 total - although the actual amount raised has increased, just because Somerset now has more households paying council tax. By 2023-24 the SRA's income from council tax had risen to £3.010 million.

The Parrett and Axe Brue Internal Drainage Boards also give the SRA a total of £20,000 each year.

Somerset is currently the only place in the UK that has this specific financial arrangement.

We use our hypothecated funding to pay for extra works across Somerset, works to reduce the risks and impacts of flooding that otherwise would not be done.

4

SRA History 2014-23

During the floods of 2013-14, organisations from across Somerset drew up a 20 Year Somerset Levels & Moors Flood Action Plan.

While recognising that nobody could ever stop flooding completely, that Plan recommended that different bodies should work together firstly to make flooding less likely, and secondly to help people get better at coping with flooding, when it did happen.

The Plan therefore proposed formally instituting a new joined-up approach to complex problems of water management, with strong local leadership and an integrated mix of whole catchment actions.



When the SRA was officially launched in January 2015 to embody this new joined-up approach, the Plan's scope was expanded to cover the whole of Somerset, and we began to oversee it.



Dredging in 2014

61

recommendations
for actions in
original Plan

The original Plan made 61 recommendations for actions by a range of different organisations. Some were done very swiftly. For example, in summer 2014, the Environment Agency dredged eight kilometres (five miles) of the River Parrett and River Tone at a cost of £6million. A few months later, Somerset County Council's Highways Department raised a road at Muchelney, so that people could still get in and out of the village during times of flood. This £2.6million scheme – paid for by the Department of Transport – won a national award. In total, 40 of the Plan's original recommendations have been completed; 12 are still in progress; nine have not progressed for various reasons (chiefly to do with costs, intrinsic difficulties, problems being addressed in other ways, and better ideas being conceived).

237

schemes and
activities
approved for
SRA funding

In furtherance of the Plan's overall objectives, between 2015 and September 2023 the SRA approved funding for 237 schemes and activities, quite often with many individual elements. Detailed descriptions of projects can be found in the Flood Risk Work part of our website.

£39m

additional
SRA funding
allocated

In total, between 2015 and April 2023, we allocated an extra £39million for works to reduce the risks and impacts of flooding across Somerset: £1.9million given us by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) for 2015-16, £24.1million from council tax and Internal Drainage Board contributions, and £13million of Growth Deal funding from the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership.



Cheddar

Different parts of the county have different needs, so there is no single answer to Somerset's many flooding problems. That is why we were set up as a partnership, so that people could work together more powerfully on combinations of different approaches. The SRA has funded an impressive depth and breadth of actions, grouped into five workstreams:

1. Dredging and River Management
2. Land Management including Natural Flood Management
3. Urban Water Management
4. Resilient Infrastructure
5. Building Local Resilience

These workstreams reflect the local priorities of the original Flood Action Plan and of Somerset people, and the need to approach different challenges in different ways.

In practice, our activities have included:

- extra maintenance, repairs and improvements
- innovations
- collaborations
- enabling major projects to go ahead
- studies, reviews, and investigations
- long-term initiatives
- moves that respond to Somerset's special characteristics
- combinations of the above

This new SRA Strategy and Flood Action Plan will incorporate recommendations from the original Plan which are still in progress, but otherwise it is now about what we want to achieve in future.

A changed context requires us to evolve our own ambitions for Somerset.



5

Taunton,
1960

The context now: Somerset flooding and climate change

Somerset flooding

Somerset has flooded for centuries, in many places and in many ways. The worst incident ever known was in January 1607, when around 200 square miles of Somerset were submerged, plus other areas adjoining the Bristol Channel. Around 2,000 people died.

More than 4000 events are recorded in the Somerset Historical Flooding Database. Hardly anywhere in Somerset is more than a few miles from somewhere that has flooded and places that have not been directly affected by flooding have still been affected indirectly. The result is a county whose folk memory is riddled with anxieties about flooding.

Across Somerset floods continue to occur. In January 2023, for example, a Major Incident was declared on the Somerset Levels and Moors, following a period of very wet weather - the eighth wettest since 1891. Extensive flooding was averted by rain suddenly giving way to a period of unusually dry weather (less than two centimetres in six weeks), and by a massive programme of Environment Agency pumping.

Hook Bridge,
January
2023



In May 2023, in the east of Somerset, another Major Incident was declared. In the area worst hit, North Cadbury, Galhampton, Yarlington and Woolston, **10 centimetres of rain fell in 90 minutes one afternoon**, an estimated 1-in-1,600 year event. Water levels in the River Cam rose over two metres in five hours and the river gauge at Weston Bampfylde recorded its highest ever level. In 16 villages and hamlets, around 180 properties were flooded inside. Outside, the force and volume of water moved cars and outbuildings. Parts of Wincanton, Bruton and Castle Cary also flooded.

In September 2023, around Taunton and in the west of Somerset, huge volumes of rain fell again during one storm. Over 10 centimetres was recorded at Roadwater; eight centimetres near Porlock, at Maundown near Wiveliscombe and at Kingston St Mary; just under 7 at Washford (the highest 24-hour total recorded there for at least 30 years). Around 50 properties and businesses were affected.

These cases of flash flooding followed earlier incidents in the 2020s in places such as Croscombe, Chard, Ilminster and Milverton.

*West Somerset,
September
2023*



Climate change

When we are talking to people about their recent experiences of flash floods across Somerset, one subject that persistently comes up is climate change. People are taken aback by the ferocity, the heaviness, the 'incredible intensity' of downpours causing flooding.

The original 2014 Somerset Flood Action Plan was a document specifically written to reflect and assuage public concerns arising from the flooding that was then submerging large parts of the Somerset Levels and Moors. It referred to climate change just once, in relation to national planning policy and drainage systems on new developments, whereas now it is an all-encompassing threat. Major surveys by organisations such as the Office for National Statistics show that around three quarters of the UK's population feel concerned about climate change, and more than half are very concerned.

Just as people's feelings are rooted in their own observations and experiences, so SRA partners are seeing through their work that floods now occurring across Somerset are intensifying because of climate change.

SRA partner Somerset Council's Climate Emergency Strategy lists the following water-related impacts of climate change:

1. Increased risk of coastal, pluvial and fluvial flooding
2. Increased flash flood risk from extreme weather events
3. Further stress on already under pressure water resources
4. Increased competition for water between agriculture, industry, households and the needs of the natural environment
5. Drought impacts on water quality and supply

Increased risk is predicted to include more rain in winter months and heavier and more intense rain on the very wettest days of all seasons, particularly summer. Peak river flows are expected to increase: different possibilities for Somerset can be explored at a very local level by using the Environment Agency's interactive Climate Change Impacts tool. This draws upon fresh evidence to estimate the impacts of climate change on river flood peaks for every 1km square of catchments.

We will take full account of the water-related impacts of climate change when deciding which schemes and activities to support with SRA funding. We will continue to learn from previous SRA-funded and climate-related projects like Adapting the Levels. Our central purpose will always be to reduce flood risks for Somerset.

In practice, we know that actual future impacts will always depend upon local conditions and how different factors combine. We know the most damaging and disruptive impacts often occur when different kinds of flooding overlap.

What we cannot know is what exactly is going to happen where and when. We will therefore need to plan and prepare more in ways which explicitly seek to take into account increased uncertainties and unpredictabilities. A more flexible kind of readiness will be required. Programmes of work should ideally be agile enough to allow for different actions to be taken at times when evidence from a changing world and changing climate suggests they will be most effective. Not too early, not too late, but as carefully judged as possible to reduce flood risks, to help people cope with flooding if flooding does occur, and to adapt successfully when need be.

*West Somerset
Railway line,
September
2023*



6

Lessons learned from SRA works so far

Some of these points may appear, in theory, to be obvious. But we list them here because years of experience have shown them to be of particular relevance, in practice, to SRA activities across Somerset and to the shaping of this SRA Strategy and Flood Action Plan.

6.1 Our joined-up approach works

A “renewed, co-ordinated and joined-up approach” to addressing flooding issues - as called for in the 2014 Flood Action Plan then ever since enshrined in the SRA’s Constitution - does bring benefits of various kinds for projects big and small. Particularly in highly protected environments, where works are legally bound to comply with numerous regulations, we have found that partners working together means more can be achieved more quickly and more easily. A joined-up approach is also very useful when partners want to go beyond their usual boundaries to get at the root causes of problems. For example, teaming up with the Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group SouthWest has enabled council highways officers to look beyond carriageways and roadside verges and ditches to places where water and mud and debris are actually coming from in problematic quantities, and to slow their flow and lessen flooding through working with farmers and landowners. Over the years many different measures have been agreed, including some changes in the overall use of fields.

6.2 We are good at helping people try out new ideas and integrate different approaches

Our special funding arrangements, layered partnership structure, non-bureaucratic flexibility and focus on going above and beyond, all make it easier for people to experiment with new approaches and different combinations of approaches. Local innovations funded or part-funded by us have consequently included the development of water injection dredging techniques on a tidal river, the use of ‘Stage 0’-inspired methods of river restoration and floodplain re-connection, the trial of payments for water storage to associations of farmers and landowners, the running of online auctions to engage farmers and landowners with natural flood management, and the detailed review and inspection of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) countywide. Such activities have put Somerset at the forefront nationally for addressing new challenges and opportunities in flood risk management.



River Aller works, courtesy of National Trust and View It 360

6.3 Natural flood management works best as part of a series of moves

Flood risk management can be successfully combined with environmental improvements, particularly through working with natural processes, but there are limits with regard to how much can be achieved and where. The ongoing 'Stage 0' scheme on the River Aller on the National Trust's Holnicote estate in West Somerset, part-funded by the SRA, shows that river restoration and floodplain reconnection can recreate more space for water, allow for more dynamism in a system, and quickly bring impressive environmental benefits, but this approach needs careful planning and monitoring and (ideally) lots of space away from infrastructure. It is not suitable for everywhere.

Our experience across Somerset has also been that the installation of NFM schemes can rarely be planned in the abstract. At some places that might be identified on a map as very suitable, landowners may not agree to works being done, or may not want to be obliged to maintain them. The best strategic results often emerge from situations where there has been good community involvement and communication, and offers to landowners can be couched attractively.

More generally, as a means of flood risk reduction, natural flood management (NFM) on its own is not enough to cope with more severe events. Our experience across Somerset has been that NFM works best in smaller sub-catchments (such as Wellhams Brook near Yeovil, the Marcombe Valley near Ashbrittle and the Horner and Aller near Porlock) where numerous schemes have been put in place which have a cumulative effect in holding back water. This can then allow for more control and flexibility in other parts of a catchment's system.



Water injection dredging, courtesy of Van Oord and Colin Turner Photography

6.4 We need to keep encouraging better knowledge and understanding, more ambition and imagination, in ways that lead to action

We have found that it has become increasingly difficult for organisations to carry out or to fund non-statutory studies and investigations. Part of the problem is that water management in Somerset is an exceedingly complex subject, with multiple variables and uncertainties. The SRA is well-placed to help but ultimately we need studies and investigations, tests and trials to lead to actions that support SRA objectives.

A model case has been the ongoing development of water injection dredging as a technique, through experiments with different vessels and equipment, through detailed academic analysis, and through regular sophisticated silt-monitoring which has served to build up a mass of useful evidence about how the River Parrett works and what should be done in response.

6.5 SRA moves to spread funding between workstreams and different parts of Somerset have worked well, but we now need a tighter focus on catchments and sub-catchments

SRA policies and grant guidelines call for the development of programmes of work that are balanced geographically and by type of activity, with judgement used to assess that balance. Between 2015 and 2023, the geographic requisite was taken to mean that there should be a reasonable division of spending between the different district council areas that then existed. Flooding problems exist across Somerset and people living in different parts of the county naturally like to know that they are getting useful and important works done in return for their funding of the SRA.



Rode Bridge

Generally speaking, this previous approach to SRA programme development worked well. It produced many worthwhile projects across the county from Rode and Beckington in the east to Dulverton in the west. But one drawback was that when district councils proposed schemes and activities as partners in the SRA, they were bound to focus on works that fell within their council boundaries. However,

council boundaries are rarely an exact match with river catchment boundaries, and this lack of congruence could be a limitation.

One benefit for us of the shift in April 2023 to a new single Somerset Council was the removal of the old district boundaries within Somerset. This helped to open up a space for us where we can instead more explicitly foreground catchments and sub-catchments. We want in future to be able to better understand flooding problems across catchments and to understand what issues will benefit most from SRA support. We want to set out distinctive SRA local priorities so that people proposing projects to the SRA will need to respond to those issues, not just their own.

Hence the creation of this SRA Strategy and Flood Action Plan, to get the best results with the money we have.

7

SRA core purpose and core principles

Our **core purpose** as a partnership is to **reduce the risks and impacts of flooding across Somerset**. Everything we do has to include this aim.

Our **principles** as a partnership are:



Doing extra

Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) membership enables partners to go above and beyond what they usually do. The SRA funds additional schemes and activities that otherwise would not happen. The SRA:

- raises extra money
- funds extra work
- provides more information
- gives people more opportunities to work together

Working together

We connect different people, different places, different sources of funding, different approaches and ideas across Somerset. Working together, making concerted efforts means that more gets done than would otherwise be possible, in ways that provide good value for local people. Somerset benefits from the collective experience and knowledge of everybody involved with the SRA.

With so many people coming at things from different angles, the SRA expects occasional tensions to arise. People involved with the SRA are encouraged to work through such tensions constructively as a means of getting better results. Setting an example, at Board level, SRA partners may challenge and hold each other to account about different schemes and approaches for the overall good of the partnership and Somerset council tax payers, but they also cooperate, support each other, and take on collective responsibility for SRA Board decisions.

Bringing people together in the ways it does, the SRA serves as a public forum and co-ordinating force for informing and inspiring communities. The more people understand local flood risks, the more people get involved, the more can be done to act on local priorities.

Acting on local priorities

The SRA concentrates on what it identifies as being important for Somerset. Calling upon technical expertise and detailed knowledge, the SRA makes choices about local priorities.

We can do this because we have been given freedom and money to do things differently. The Flood Risk Management Authorities (FRMAs) who are partners in the SRA have daily statutory duties to carry out, bound by national stipulations and calculations. We provide a more flexible local space, a space where people working together can be more wide-ranging, more proactive and more creative in the approaches they take to Somerset's flood risk management needs. Things can be more joined-up between organisations, within catchments and across the county.

When people look at things in a more joined-up way, more possibilities arise. It becomes easier for us to spot opportunities for bringing schemes and activities together. It also becomes easier to identify areas where there are gaps. Through a process of assessing which of these areas should be our local priorities, and by working together with communities to reduce the risks and impacts of flooding, we set about doing extra works which meet local priorities.

8

SRA themes

Rippling out from its core principles, the SRA has five themes flowing throughout its work. These express in broad terms what it is important for the SRA to be doing. They are practical propositions for action.

The themes incorporate lessons learned from Somerset flooding, climate change and the SRA's own history. They also flow from study of SRA partners' own plans and strategies, from workshops with partners about this new Plan, and from desires and frustrations expressed by residents, businesses and stakeholders across Somerset.

- **Working with communities**
- **Strengthening operations, boosting maintenance**
- **Building resilience, encouraging adaptation**
- **Conserving and enhancing the special environments of Somerset**
- **Protecting the economy from flooding**

What gives SRA works their own distinctive fingerprint is the combination of these themes.

The following sections flesh out what each theme means:

8.1 Working with communities

The aim of working with communities is to get more done than would otherwise be possible, and done in better ways. We are open to working with all sorts of people, groups, and places. The only rule we insist upon is that to get SRA funding, schemes and activities must benefit communities. The next most important thing is seeking to build a culture of mutual understanding and support, with people contributing and learning from each other in different ways. Then there are endless possibilities. Something that sets the SRA apart is its practical enthusiasm for and encouragement of ideas that bubble up from communities for dealing with flooding problems. We like to help people with good ideas but a lack of technical expertise and confidence turn them into action.

We also want to help more Somerset people learn about flood risks, so that even more may be motivated to get involved in suitable schemes and activities, through which they may help themselves and their neighbours to protect and strengthen the places where they live.

We will therefore continue to help create and reinforce groups and networks, through a range of practical measures. We will strengthen the SRA's position as a source of useful extra collated information, so that more people understand who is responsible for what as regards flood and water management, and people better understand flood risks.

8.2 Strengthening operations, boosting maintenance

In a changing world, some basic needs persist.

Flooding is disruptive and at times damaging. Summer deluges – as seen in 1997 and 2012 when some parts of the Somerset Levels and Moors were inundated for weeks – are especially damaging for farmland and protected wildlife sites, when crops are growing, and birds and animals are breeding. Flood risks are predicted to get worse, and the SRA and its partners cannot control the weather or promise to prevent flooding. But carefully-targeted efforts must still be made to protect people and places.

In many places across Somerset, effective management of water levels will continue to be crucial for residents, businesses including farmers, road users and wildlife. This is particularly true of the low-lying landscape of the Somerset Levels and Moors, criss-crossed with artificially-created drainage channels, and studded with a panoply of 15,000 water level control structures. Effective management includes having capacity to convey water away from troublesome areas.

Through the SRA, more funding can be given for maintenance and improvement works enabling greater operational flexibility, control and safety in the management of water systems. Types of work done may include dredging, riverbank-raising, repairs, replacements and upgrades, jetting, emptying, clearing and cleaning, and installations of new equipment.

More will need to be done to slow the flow of water down to vulnerable locations and to store water in suitable places, and people will need to adapt to a changing world. Such moves will be gradual and operational management, conveyance and maintenance will continue to be important.

8.3 Building resilience, encouraging adaptation

'Resilience' and 'adaptation' mean different things to different people, and frequently feature in glossaries with varying definitions. What is meant by them here?

Put very simply, in the context of flooding, 'resilience' is best taken to refer to a state of mind or a way of behaving that is one stage on from 'resistance'.

'Resistance' would like to see flooding prevented by big, expensive, imposing measures - like a tidal barrier - which mean that life can still go on pretty much as it does now.

'Resilience' would also prefer to keep things as they are, but it accepts that flooding cannot be prevented. So, it is important to prepare for flooding in ways that mean people and places suffer as little damage as possible, and afterwards recover as quickly as possible. As part of recovering, 'resilience' learns some useful lessons for next time, then things largely go back to their previous state.

'Adaptation' accepts that keeping things as they are is no longer possible. Measures can still be taken to resist, and people and places can still become more resilient, but fundamentally different measures - perhaps even different ways of life and doing things - have to be seriously considered, and gradually and thoughtfully acted upon.

'Adaptation' is about people and places changing in ways that are going to mean their future is more successful, than it would be if they did not change.

Why are these ideas relevant to Somerset and the SRA? Because across our county levels of flood risk vary from place to place, and some places are more vulnerable than others, because of factors such as their geography and geology. Therefore mixes of different measures will be needed for different places at different times.

People and places cannot be ordered or forced to adapt. We will help communities better understand their flood risks, because better understanding will be essential for people wanting to make their own decisions about the future. As people make their own decisions, we will offer support, advice, information and practical help.

8.4 Protecting the economy from flooding

An Economic Impact Assessment produced following the floods of 2013-14 found the economic cost to Somerset was up to £147.5 million, with the South West region also suffering. Among the main findings were that half of all Somerset businesses were badly affected by the floods, and that the closure of 80 roads cost the local economy up to £15 million. The impact on residential property was up to £20 million, and the impact on public mental health was “devastating”. Response costs for the Environment Agency, emergency services and local government were up to £19.3 million.

The flash floods that hit towns and villages across Somerset in 2020-23 and the Major Incident declared in January 2023 on the Somerset Levels and Moors reminded us of the impacts, disruptions and economic costs of flooding.

Through our actions and our ways of working together in the SRA, we will help to reassure businesses that Somerset is somewhere they can invest and expand. Our track record includes contributions towards the Bridgwater Tidal Barrier, which will help to protect more than 1,500 businesses; support for the development of the Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Improvements Scheme; and funding for drainage upgrades and extra maintenance activities which have helped to reduce costly delays and disruption on hundreds of roads including the A38 between Taunton and Wellington, the A358 near Combe Florey and the A39 at Carhampton.

We will help to generate confidence in the exploration of new opportunities. We are particularly interested in possibilities for growth that may arise from climate change and moves towards Net Zero, from national policy ambitions for farming and the natural environment, and from the inter-relations of house-building and Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS).

Furthermore, flooding should not necessarily always be treated only as a threat. Every flood presents new facts which could spur innovation and growth, in many areas including architecture, water-related technology and storage. Somerset could augment its burgeoning reputation as Britain’s green powerhouse by leading the way with transformative possibilities.

8.5 Conserving and enhancing Somerset's special environments

'Special environments' refers to habitats such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Ramsar sites, which are wetlands of international importance designated under the Ramsar Convention and protected by law. Especially when working in sensitive areas of the Somerset Levels and Moors, SRA partners aim to get the right balance between land being too wet and land being too dry. The ideal sought is right amounts of water in right places at right times. That could mean large volumes of water being conveyed out to sea; it could mean the 'splashy conditions' favoured by over-wintering birds; it could mean peaty ground not drying out and releasing carbon into the atmosphere; it could mean farmers and landowners being paid to store water to help avoid flooding; and a myriad of other localised possibilities, relating to SRA themes and principles and to helping nature to recover and flourish.

'Special environments' also includes Protected Landscapes, such as Exmoor National Park and the Quantock Hills, Mendip Hills and Blackdown Hills Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). It includes archaeology, ancient monuments, listed buildings, cultural history, and other distinctive elements of places (like the drangs of Porlock, the goyles of Crowcombe, the Somerset Levels' rhynes and the Mendip Hills' swallets) which infuse their character and give people pride and pleasure.

We respect the emotional connections that people across Somerset feel for their natural, built, social and historic environments. As part of SRA-funded works, local environments will be conserved and where possible enhanced, and different approaches will be taken at different times in different places to reflect different circumstances, including working with natural processes where possible.

*King's
Sedgemoor
Drain*



9

SRA objectives

Our core purpose, principles and themes are encapsulated in the following aspirations. We will develop and fund selected schemes and activities that advance these objectives:

1. Reduce the risks and impacts of flooding across Somerset.
2. Maintain access and connections during times of flood for communities and businesses across Somerset.
3. Increase the resilience of people, places and the environment to flooding, while adapting to climate change.
4. Protect Somerset's economy from the impacts of flooding, promote business confidence and encourage new opportunities.
5. While doing the above, conserve and enhance Somerset's special environments (natural, built, social, cultural) for all who live and work in Somerset and visit.

10

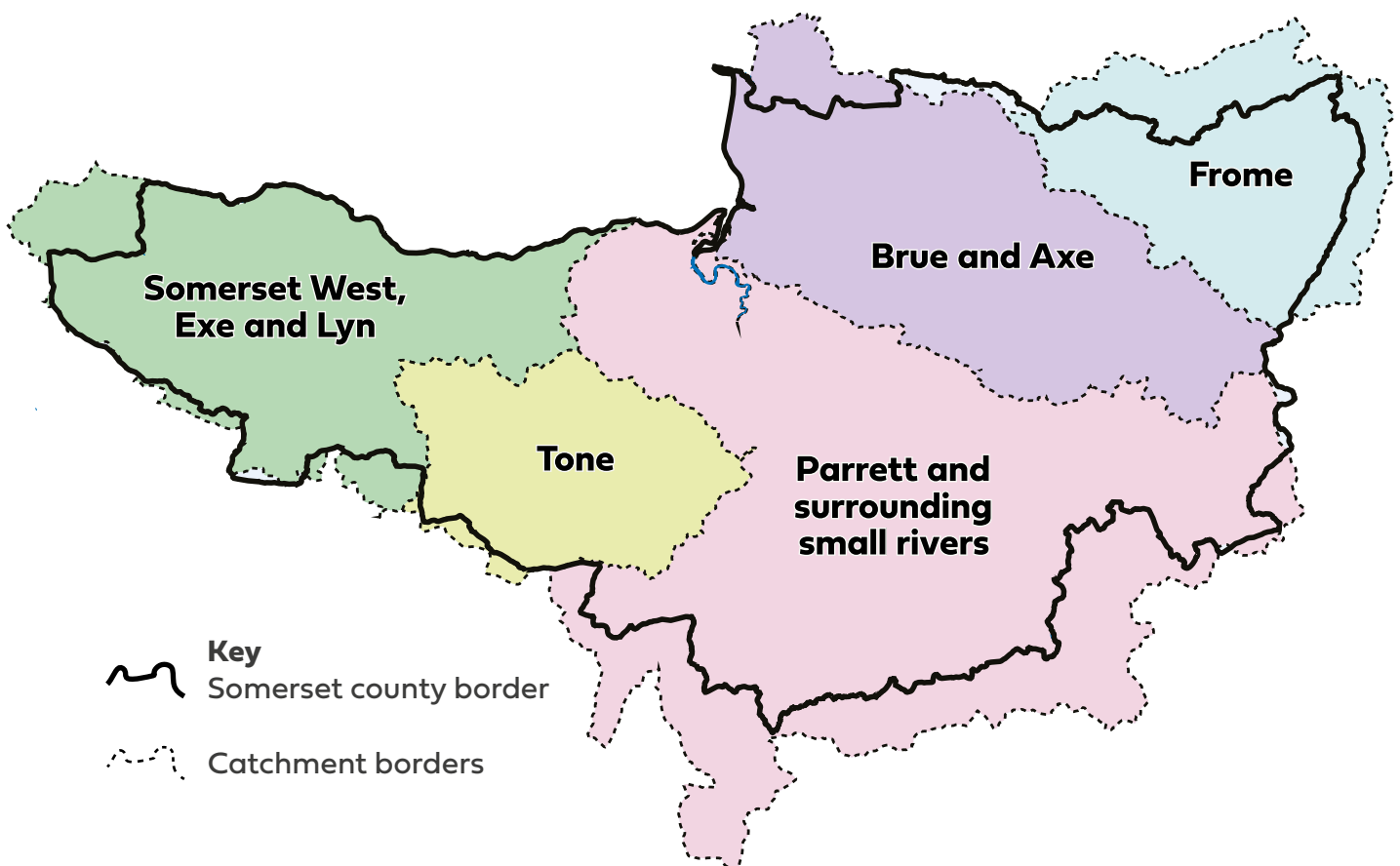
How is this SRA Strategy and Flood Action Plan going to be delivered?

The SRA will take a catchment-based approach. A catchment is an area of land from which water - especially rainwater - drains and flows down into streams, rivers, lakes and often the sea.

Somerset's five main river catchments are the Tone, Parrett, Axe and Brue, the Somerset Frome (also known as the upper part of the Bristol Frome), and West Somerset Streams.

Parts of the River Exe headwaters, the Dorset Stour and East Devon catchments also flow out of Somerset.

We will analyse catchments to understand problems with excessive amounts of flood water, we will select issues about which the SRA can do most in line with our objectives, and we will fund proposals which duly benefit Somerset people and places.



Approaches will be taken which balance investment between upper, mid and lower catchment areas, and combine different measures. For instance, in general terms, SRA partners may seek to slow the flow of water down through upper catchments, store it in mid-catchments, and through lower catchments convey it safely out to sea or - when and where conditions are right - let it spread over floodplains.

We will draw together on a wide range of insights won through years of carrying out and assessing many different techniques of land, watercourse and infrastructure management, and of working with communities, businesses and special environments.

The ideal sought is to have right amounts of water in right places at right times, while recognising that definitions of 'right' will always be subject to negotiation, compromise and what in practice it is possible to achieve.

To support our catchment approach and inform future funding proposals to the SRA we are preparing summaries of the five main catchments in Somerset.

Our catchment analyses include:

- Catchment descriptions
- Summaries of specific local flood issues
- Maps showing areas at risk of flooding
- Indications of key infrastructure
- Details of SRA-funded schemes and activities in the catchment
- Notes on SRA-funded studies that could lead to SRA-funded works
- Notes on works planned by SRA partners
- Areas of opportunity for the SRA

These sub-catchment overviews will be key documents shaping SRA-funded activities. Proposals to the SRA for funding will have to show how they tackle issues of interest to the SRA and support SRA objectives.

The SRA wants to fund projects that are integrated with other relevant actions across catchments and tackle flood risk from many angles. We want more working together across organisations, leading to the cost-effective delivery of schemes and activities that have multiple benefits.

Each year as we develop a programme of works, we will bring together our partners and key stakeholders. We will understand what is already being done and identify where – with SRA help – more can be done. The expertise and knowledge of SRA partners and stakeholders will be crucial to the success of this approach.

Catchment issues and types of work

Listed below are examples of different types of works generally thought suitable for different parts of catchments, as responses to some common problems.

Uplands and Hills

Common issues

Sheets of water flowing overland; localised surface water flooding; flooding from small watercourses.

Possibilities

Increase the volumes of flood water that can be stored and held back in features such as ponds and swales.

Work with farmers and landowners to reduce runoff, for example through better soil management so that more water can percolate into the ground.

Slow the flow of water down to vulnerable areas by using techniques of Natural Flood Management (NFM), such as forming woody dams and planting trees and hedgerows.

Mid-slopes

Common issues

Fast runoff causing flash flooding, particularly during intense periods of heavy rain.

Undersized channels and undersized structures such as bridges can make problems worse, especially if there are also blockages.

Possibilities

Work with farmers and landowners to store water and slow its flow.

Maintain and improve watercourse systems and structures, for example by removing blockages, increasing capacity or diverting water in suitable ways.

Support flood resistance and resilience measures for properties.

Improve flood warning systems.

Lowlands

Common issues

Flooding from rivers overflowing their banks, often for a long time, because of extended periods of rain or combinations of events.

Problems are worsened - particularly in areas below high-tide / river / flood bank level - if outfalls to the sea become tide-locked and drainage systems get overwhelmed.

Possibilities

Maintain and improve watercourses, flood banks and associated infrastructure such as pumping stations, and increase capacity where feasible.

Consider land use changes, such as growing climate-resilient crops, or paying farmers and landowners to store floodwater.

In the longer term, consider restoring natural watercourses and floodplains and providing more space for water, as part of agreed moves towards adaptation.

Urban areas

Common issues

Flash flooding because of surface water running off from impermeable areas (such as concrete, tarmac, and hard paving) and a lack of capacity in drainage systems and small watercourses.

In built-up areas nearer the sea, water can back up in rivers and drainage systems because of high sea levels.

Possibilities

Identify capacity issues.

Maintain and improve drainage systems and small watercourses, for example by removing blockages, increasing capacity, and retrofitting Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) for more natural ways of storing and conveying runoff.

Discourage paving over domestic gardens with impermeable surfaces and encourage SuDS techniques, like de-paving and using water butts.

Improve flood awareness, resilience and adaptation.

Catchment-wide

Common issues

All types of flooding; community resilience and adaptation; strategic road network and infrastructure resilience.

Possibilities

Work with communities to help them better help themselves, for example by setting up flood action groups to identify and tackle local flooding problems (for example, through doing suitable maintenance tasks) and to support each other after a flood.

Work with riparian owners (who own land next to rivers) to help them understand and fulfil their responsibilities effectively.

Along roads, assess any drainage blockages, maintain and improve.

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Flood Action Plan

The SRA's catchment approach makes sure that what is in the SRA Flood Action Plan all contributes to achieving SRA objectives. The SRA strategy and our catchment approach sets the strategic framework within which the SRA funds projects. The SRA Flood Action Plan sets out the specifics of what will be done. The SRA Flood Action Plan is a dynamic document constantly under review.

It evolves and changes month by month, year by year, as new data, knowledge and opportunities emerge, and partners learn more through working together and developing joint schemes and activities.

The Flood Action Plan will be a separate document prepared following public engagement in 2023-24.

Somerset Rivers Authority Strategy Questionnaire.

To be read in conjunction with the draft strategy document.

All information available at www.srastrategy.co.uk

Core Purpose

The SRA's core purpose as a partnership is to reduce the risks and impacts of flooding across Somerset.

Do you agree with this as the SRA's core purpose?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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If you disagree, why do you disagree?

Our Principles as a partnership are:

1. Doing extra
2. Working together
3. Acting on local priorities

These are the correct principles for the SRA?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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Do you have any further comments to make about our principles?

Please refer to the principle number when responding.

THEMES

1. Working with communities

The aim of working with communities is to get more done than would otherwise be possible, and done in better ways. We are open to working with all sorts of people, groups, and places. The only rule we insist upon is that to get SRA funding, schemes and activities must benefit communities.

The next most important thing is seeking to build a culture of mutual understanding and support, with people contributing and learning from each other in different ways. Then there are endless possibilities. Something that sets the SRA apart is its practical enthusiasm for and encouragement of ideas that bubble up from communities for dealing with flooding problems. We like to help people with good ideas but a lack of technical expertise and confidence turn them into action.

We also want to help more Somerset people learn about flood risks, so that even more may be motivated to get involved in suitable schemes and activities, through which they may help themselves and their neighbours to protect and strengthen the places where they live.

We will therefore continue to help create and reinforce groups and networks, through a range of practical measures. We will strengthen the SRA's position as a source of useful extra collated information, so that more people understand who is responsible for what as regards flood and water management, and people better understand flood risks.

Do you agree that this theme should be a key part of what the SRA does?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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2. Strengthening operations, boosting maintenance

In a changing world, some basic needs persist.

Flooding is disruptive and at times damaging. Summer deluges – as seen in 1997 and 2012 when some parts of the Somerset Levels and Moors were inundated for weeks – are especially damaging for farmland and protected wildlife sites, when crops are growing, and birds and animals are breeding. Flood risks are predicted to get worse, and the SRA and its partners cannot control the weather or promise to prevent flooding. But carefully-targeted efforts must still be made to protect people and places.

In many places across Somerset, effective management of water levels will continue to be crucial for residents, businesses including farmers, road users and wildlife. This is particularly true of the low-lying landscape of the Somerset Levels and Moors, criss-crossed with artificially-created drainage channels, and studded with a panoply of 15,000 water level control structures. Effective management includes having capacity to convey water away from troublesome areas.

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More will need to be done to slow the flow of water down to vulnerable locations and to store water in suitable places, and people will need to adapt to a changing world. Such moves will be gradual and operational management, conveyance and maintenance will continue to be important.

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Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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3. Building resilience, encouraging adaptation

'Resilience' and 'adaptation' mean different things to different people, and frequently feature in glossaries with varying definitions. What is meant by them here?

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Do you agree that this theme should be a key part of what the SRA does?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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4. Protecting the economy from flooding

An Economic Impact Assessment produced following the floods of 2013-14 found the economic cost to Somerset was up to £147.5 million, with the South West region also suffering. Among the main findings were that half of all Somerset businesses were badly affected by the floods, and that the closure of 80 roads cost the local economy up to £15 million. The impact on residential property was up to £20 million, and the impact on public mental health was “devastating”. Response costs for the Environment Agency, emergency services and local government were up to £19.3 million.

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reduce costly delays and disruption on hundreds of roads including the A38 between Taunton and Wellington, the A358 near Combe Florey and the A39 at Carhampton.

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Furthermore, flooding should not necessarily always be treated only as a threat. Every flood presents new facts which could spur innovation and growth, in many areas including architecture, water-related technology and storage. Somerset could augment its burgeoning reputation as Britain's green powerhouse by leading the way with transformative possibilities.

Do you agree that this theme should be a key part of what the SRA does?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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5. Conserving and enhancing Somerset's special environments

'Special environments' refers to habitats such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Ramsar sites, which are wetlands of international importance designated under the Ramsar Convention and protected by law. Especially when working in sensitive areas of the Somerset Levels and Moors, SRA partners aim to get the right balance between land being too wet and land being too dry. The ideal sought is right amounts of water in right places at right times. That could mean large volumes of water being conveyed out to sea; it could mean the 'splashy conditions' favoured by over-wintering birds; it could mean peaty ground not drying out and releasing carbon into the atmosphere; it could mean farmers and landowners being paid to store water to help avoid flooding; and a myriad of other localised possibilities, relating to SRA themes and principles and to helping nature to recover and flourish.

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We respect the emotional connections that people across Somerset feel for their natural, built, social and historic environments. As part of SRA-funded works, local environments will be conserved and where possible enhanced, and different approaches will be taken at different times in different places to reflect different circumstances, including working with natural processes where possible.

Do you agree that this theme should be a key part of what the SRA does?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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If you had to put these themes in order of importance to you, how would you rank them (1 being most important and 5 being least important)?

1

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3

4

5

Do you have any comments you would like to add about our Themes?

Please refer to the relevant theme number when responding.

Objectives

1. Reduce the risks and impacts of flooding across Somerset.

Do you agree with this as an objective for the SRA?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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2. Maintain access and connections during times of flood for communities and businesses across Somerset.

Do you agree with this as an objective for the SRA?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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3. Increase the resilience of people, places and the environment to flooding, while adapting to climate change.

Do you agree with this as an objective for the SRA?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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4. Protect Somerset's economy from the impacts of flooding, promote business confidence and encourage new opportunities.

Do you agree with this as an objective for the SRA?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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5. While doing the above, conserve and enhance Somerset's special environments (natural, built, social, cultural) for all who live and work in Somerset and visit.

Do you agree with this as an objective for the SRA?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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If you had to put these objectives in order of importance to you, how would you rank them? (1 being most important and 5 being least important)

1

2

3

4

5

Please add any further comments you have on the above proposed objectives, refer to the relevant objective number(s) you are commenting on.

About you

What is your name?

First name

Surname

What is your email address?

What is your postcode?

Are you responding...

Please state

What is the name of your organisation (if applicable)?

The following questions are asked as part of our commitment to equalities monitoring and will help us to ensure that we are reaching a wide range of people with different backgrounds and experiences. They are not used to identify individuals but may be used within the Somerset Rivers Authority (hosted by Somerset Council) for statistical, monitoring and service improvement purposes. Please answer as many questions as you feel comfortable with.

What is your age?

What gender do you identify as?

What is your ethnicity?

Somerset Council
Scrutiny Committee Climate and Place
– 17th January 2024



Update on Flexible Plastics Collection Trial

Lead Officer: Mike Cowdell

Author: Mike Cowdell

Contact Details: Michael.cowdell@somerset.gov.uk

Executive Lead Member: Dixie Darch

1. Summary

- 1.1. The externally funded Flexible plastics trial was delivered to 3600 properties around Frome during May 2023. The trial included communications, engagement with residents and provided participants with a blue transparent bags to present flexible plastics alongside the existing recycling service.

The trial yielded impressive results, with participation rates at 65% and very low contamination rates underlying the commitment of Somerset Residents to sustainable waste practices and the quality of communications, engagement and service delivery.

The Council has in principal agreement to extend the trial to 20,000 properties in the East of the County from spring/summer 2024.

- 1.2. The delivery of trial relates to provide a Greener, More Sustainable Somerset, by removing a previously uncollected waste fraction from rubbish and developing a UK outlet to recycle the material into new raw materials.

2. Issues for consideration / Recommendations

- 2.1. That the content of the report is noted by members

3. Background

- 3.1. The government has indicated that households and businesses will need to be able to collect and recycle flexible plastics by March 2027. The national FlexCollect pilot aims to help establish the best way of collecting such material from the kerbside, while stimulating the development of the UK's reprocessing infrastructure.

- 3.2. A three-year national trial had been operated by SUEZ, who coincidentally provide Somerset's kerbside collections. The trial started in in April 2022 and the first pilot phase involved Cheltenham Borough Council, South Gloucester Council and Maldon

District Council. Somerset is one of several authorities involved in the two-year second phase.

The trial is Funded by DEFRA, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and the [Future of Plastics Fund](#) (a fund contributed to by manufacturers). The costs of the trial are being met by the national project. The only costs to Somerset Council has been time and resource.

- 3.3. The trial commenced in Somerset on the 22nd May 2023 and involves around 3,600 homes in the North East and North of Frome. These were selected by demographic requirements from the national pilot and depot capacity.

Collection of the plastic bags and wrapping start for the participating homes in the week beginning Monday 22 May, as part of the usual weekly recycling collections.

Residents were asked to put the new materials into a plastic bag provided by crews. The bag should then be placed between two recycling containers to stop it being blown away.

- 3.4. All trial households were written to twice before the trial commenced, the first communication was warm up literature and the 2nd detailed instructions, including Figure 1 below, that detailed new materials being collected, as well as a supply of Blue Bags to present the material for collection in. Drop in sessions were held for local residents to answer any questions or queries that they had around the new service.

Further “nudge” communication was provided one month after commencement to ensure that trial participants were fully on board and

Figure 1: Participant Instructions

What will I be able to recycle?	
 All plastic bags carrier bags salad/fruit/vegetable bags frozen food bags bread bags cereal bags flower bags	 Cheese, fish, and meat wrapping
 Confectionery wrappers chocolate sweets biscuits cakes ice cream & chewing gum wrappers	 Outer layer bags and wrapping multipack toilet & kitchen roll magazine & newspaper wrapping
 Foil lined packaging crisp/snack packets coffee bags	 Plastic film & sleeves removeable film lids plastic sleeves for bottles and jars
	 Fruit & vegetable net bags
	 Bubble wrap & cling film

Please DO NOT use your collection bag for:

- Items other than plastic bags and wrapping
- ✗ Pouches, sachets and packets – microwaveable food, baby/pet food, cosmetics, detergent and cleaning
- ✗ Blister packs, pills, and tablets packaging
- ✗ Compostable or biodegradable bags and wrapping
- ✗ Crisp tubes
- ✗ Disposable gloves or masks
- ✗ Foam or polystyrene
- ✗ Plastic bottles, pots, tubs, or trays
- ✗ Plastic straws or cutlery

All items should be clean and free of food.

- 3.5. The trial involved the weekly collection of Flexible plastics alongside the existing kerbside recycling collection scheme (figure 2) across six recycling rounds. The blue bags containing the material were separated at the Transfer Station and sent for reprocessing (Sterling Polymers, Hartlepool)

Figure 2 – Blue Recycling Bag alongside Somerset Council Waste Receptacles



Figure 3 – Recycling Collection in Action



- 3.6. The trial continues and to date has garnered impressive participation and successes the key performance factors achieved so far across the 3600 properties are:

- On average each household presents **0.54 bags per household per week**, with each bag weighing around 225g (the material is very light)
- Each collection cycle around 1800 bags are produced, **with 65% of residents regularly engaging with the service**
- Just under 500kg of recycling material is captured each cycle from participating residences.
- Service user compliance with the trial has been very positive, with a very small percentage of bags being rejected from processes (**1 in 400 bags are rejected**)

- 3.7. The trial has been popular in Somerset with participation rates exceeding project objectives, this been achieved through concise and clear communications developed in partnership with Wrap, positive and ongoing communications with residents by Suez and Waste Services staff. The restrictions placed on refuse bin capacity through three weekly collections also make this an attractive service to residents as well as allowing them to further participate in recycling as much as they can.

The low levels of contamination demonstrate the effectiveness of the communication and engagement with residents, showing that that clear and concise information produced worked well and was readily understood. Downstream reporting indicates that 84% of all material collected through the trial was Target material.

There have been no issues incorporating this material into the existing waste collection infrastructure, providing a cost effective mechanism to introduce a new stream of waste recycling materials into our collection regime. The extraction of the bags from the general plastic and cans stream has occurred on a picking line within the Transfer Station, however modifications to the picking line would be required if the trial was extended.

- 3.8.** Following the success of the trial Future Recycling Limited have agreed, in principle, to extend and fully fund the trial to 20,000 properties from next spring and bridge the funding gap until New Burdens funding can be supplied from Government to extend the flexible collections across Somerset that is timetabled to take place in 2027. An externally funded modification to the picking line has been agreed to facilitate the extension of the trial.

As the modification is relatively expensive, this restricts the expansion of the trial to areas service by Evercreech Depot, i.e. the former Mendip and South Somerset Districts. The expansion of the trial is due to commence late spring/summer 24. The key output of the trial expansion is to test the learning achieved so far on a much greater scale prior to the implementation out of a county wide service as required by Consistency Legislation

4. Consultations undertaken

- 4.1.** No Consultations have been taken in the production of this report

5. Implications

- 5.1.** That the outcomes of the trial have been fully met and will enable an externally funded expansion of the trial area to 20,000 properties from Spring/Summer 2024

6. Background papers

- 6.1.** There are no background papers