

Somerset Council
Scrutiny Committee
– 17/01/2024



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

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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