

Somerset Council
Scrutiny Committee
– 11/11/2024



Somerset Rivers Authority 2023-24 Annual Report

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Executive Lead Member: Graham Oakes, Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change

Division / Local Member: All

1. Summary

- 1.1.** The Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Annual Report 2023-24 provides a comprehensive account of what has been achieved through the partnership. 2023-24 was the ninth year of Somerset Rivers Authority funded actions. The extra activities described in the report are only possible because of the unique arrangements we have in Somerset to fund the Somerset Rivers Authority. Scrutiny Panel is asked to review the report and feedback on the work of the SRA.
- 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. The SRA published a new strategy in March 2024 which follows on from the FAP and sets the SRA's vision and objectives for the next 10 years and beyond.
- 1.3.** 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. Somerset Council appoints 6 council representatives to the SRA Board. The Board is Chaired by Somerset Councillor, Mike Stanton.

The SRA is funded directly from council tax. This is as a result of Government taking action specifically to add an amount of funding to Somerset's council tax base for the purpose of the SRA. This was done using a parliamentary process - the Alternative Notional Amount – which in 2016/17 allowed district councils and Somerset County Council to add a small amount extra to council tax bills without it affecting the amount that councils could raise for their own

services. This originally amounted to £2.7m, because of new homes being constructed this now amounts to approximately £3m per year for use by the SRA. The council tax charge for the SRA is £14.65 per year per household.

- 1.4.** The SRA is a partnership that includes Flood Risk Management Authorities (FRMAs). Its members are Somerset Council, the Environment Agency, Natural England, the Wessex Regional Flood & Coastal Committee, the Axe-Brue Internal Drainage Board , Parrett Internal Drainage Board and Wessex Water.
- 1.5.** The SRA is not actually a Risk Management Authority (RMA) as defined in the Flood and Water Management Act (FWMA) 2010. The original intention in 2015 was that the Government would introduce legislation to create Rivers Authorities which would have similar powers to existing Risk Management Authorities. The SRA is currently an unincorporated association – a partnership. 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 County Council (which is the Lead Local Flood Authority), the Environment Agency, Internal Drainage Boards and Wessex Water are designated as RMAs. RMAs have statutory functions, duties and powers set out in the FWMA 2010 that enable them to fulfil their various functions.
- 1.6.** Through the use of SRA funds, additional work is undertaken. 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 based upon local priorities for the whole of Somerset. It raises extra money. It enables extra work.
- 1.7.** No other county in England has the unique funding arrangement that Somerset has to deliver extra actions to reduce the risk and impacts of flooding.

2. Issues for consideration / Recommendations

- 2.1.** Scrutiny Panel is asked to review the SRA's 2023-24 Annual Report and comment and feedback on what was achieved and the work of the SRA.
- 2.2.** Scrutiny Panel is asked to note plans for a new Community Flood Action Fund.

3. Background

- 3.1.** The SRA Annual Report provides a comprehensive account of the activities funded by the SRA during 2023/24. SRA projects are delivered primarily by the SRA partner organisations – organisations that sit on the SRA Board. The annual report shows how much extra has been achieved through the SRA

partnership in the past 12 months. The annual report is provided for Scrutiny Panel Members as Appendix 1 or can be accessed at [SRA Annual Report 2023-24 - Somerset Rivers Authority](#).

3.2. Since the start of the 2024/25 financial year the SRA has been looking ahead to the future and making changes. The SRA was established in January 2015 as a result of an action in the 20 Year Flood Action Plan (FAP) that was drafted following the major floods of 2013/14. Once established the SRA Board oversaw the delivery of the FAP. A lot has been achieved since 2015 and a lot has changed, not least the impacts of climate change being increasingly felt. Ten years since the 2013/14 flooding the SRA Board approved a new strategy in March 2024. This strategy was crafted specifically for the SRA partnership and sets the objectives of the SRA for the next 10 years and beyond. The strategy can be accessed at www.somersetiversauthority.org.uk - [SRA Strategy 2024-34 - Somerset Rivers Authority](#).

3.3. 2025-26 Enhanced Programme Development

The process for approving a SRA funded programme of works for 2025-26 is underway. The deadline for applications was 14 October. 17 applications were submitted with a total value of £5.5m. It is estimated that the budget available to the SRA for the 2025-26 Enhanced Programme will be £2.5m. Applications will be assessed by a panel of officers from across the SRA partner organisations during November 2024. Officers will make a recommendation to the SRA Board as to which projects should be funded. The Board will consider this recommendation in January 2025. In previous years projects have not always been allocated the full amount of funding requested.

3.4. In June 2024 the SRA Board approved setting up a small grants process. This process is to be known as the Community Flood Action Fund (CFAF). CFAF will be limited to projects between £3,000 and £20,000. There is a recognised gap that there are many small-scale interventions that could offer localised improvements to flood risk and that may be undertaken by organisations other than risk management authorities. The CFAF process is likely to be more attractive and accessible to organisations such as Parish and Town Councils or small charities and community groups.

CFAF funding **can** be used for

- maintenance, improvement or capital works that meet one of more of our objectives.
- surveys, permits etc that are directly linked to delivery as part of a project
- projects that can be started and completed within a reasonable timescale

CFAF funding **cannot** be used for

- Match funding towards projects over £20,000
- Funding for actions that only benefit a single household, landowner or business
- Feasibility studies or investigation reports, direct flood recovery support (emergency response)

The CFAF process will have a ‘lighter touch’ approach to application and assessment compared to the main grant process. CFAF will be open year-round with applications reviewed and approved on a quarterly basis by a Review Panel. The intention is that applications can be considered and approved swiftly, enabling prompt action to be taken.

CFAF projects should be straightforward and deliverable within a reasonable timescale. CFAF will not be appropriate for projects that require investigations, feasibilities and assessments before they can start. Projects should be ready to start as soon as possible once funding is approved.

The SRA Board has agreed to set aside £200,000 of 2025-26 funding for this programme. Once the set aside funds have been exhausted the scheme would close for the rest of the year.

CFAF will be promoted from November 2024. The fund will open for applications from 10 December 2025. Deadline for applications will be end of February 2025. First projects will receive funding from 1 April 2025.

3.5. 2024/25 Funding

Table A shows that the total available funds at the start of the year were £6,932k. Of this amount £3,853 was carried forward from 2023-24 and £3,079k was raised in the 2024-25 precept.

Area of spend	2024/25 Funding Allocation £,000	Spent	Forecast				Forecast	Re-alloc-ations required £,000	Percentage on area of spend %
		2024/25 Q1 £,000	2024/25 Q2 £,000	2024/25 Q3 £,000	2024/25 Q4 £,000	2025/26 Onwards £,000			
Enhanced Programme	5,854	886	760	1,039	1,738	1,490	36	84%	
Core work and development	163	5	20	10	10	110	-7	2%	
Administration & Staffing	359	63	65	65	65	65	0	5%	
Contingency	556	0	0	0	15	556	0	8%	
TOTALS	6,932	954	845	1,114	1,828	2,221	29	100%	

- 3.6. Funds carried forward from the previous year are already allocated to projects approved by the SRA Board. The only funds not allocated to projects is the SRA contingency fund which was £556,000 in April 2024.
- 3.7. £954,000 was spent on SRA projects and staff and overheads in the first quarter of 2024/25. It is currently estimated that £4,737,000 of SRA funds will be spent this financial year.

4. Consultations undertaken

- 4.1. The SRA's 2023-24 Annual Report was published on 6th June on the SRA website in advance of it being considered and approved for publication at the 14 June Board meeting. 6 Somerset Councillors sit on the SRA Board. The general public can attend SRA Board meetings and ask questions so had the opportunity to review and comment on the annual report before it was finalised.

5. Implications

- 5.1. The Somerset Rivers Authority is an unincorporated association hosted by Somerset Council. There are no direct financial implications to Somerset Council budgets arising from the hosting of the SRA.
- 5.2. As SRA funding is raised through Council Tax Full Council has the opportunity to review the proposal for funding of the SRA at budget setting each February. As Somerset Council is the Host Authority and Accountable Body for the SRA a Key Decision is taken each year to approve passing through of SRA funds for SRA activities. Any matters associated with spending SRA funds will be subject to the SRA' established governance and decision making processes and will also follow Somerset Council's financial and governance regulations as the Accountable Body. 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
- 5.3. Somerset Council employs the SRA partnership team – 4 full-time equivalent posts and one part time Technical Advisor – so is responsible for all HR and employment matters. SRA staff are 100% funded from funds ring fenced for the purpose of the SRA
- 5.4. Equalities Implications: no equalities implications associated with this report
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. Somerset Rivers Authority Strategy 2024-34

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