

# Joint Scrutiny Panel of Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA)

Minutes of a meeting of the Joint Scrutiny Panel of SRA held on Monday  
21 May 2018 at 2pm in the Wyndham Room, County Hall, Taunton.

## Present

Cllr Eve Berry  
Cllr Roy Mackenzie  
Cllr Simon Coles (Vice-Chair)  
Cllr Libby Lisgo  
Cllr Kathy Pearce

Cllr Sue Steele  
Cllr Rosemay Woods  
Julian Taylor (Chairman)  
David Tratt

**Other Members present:** Cllr David Hall and Cllr Tessa Munt

31 **Apologies for Absence:** Cllr Brenda Maitland-Walker, Cllr Phillip Ham, Cllr Alan Wedderkopp, Cllr Gerard Tucker, and Cllr Brian Smedley.

32 **Declarations of Interest** – agenda item 2  
Julian Taylor declared the following personal interests: resides in an area affected by flooding; nominated member of Parrett IDB.

33 **Minutes of the last meeting** – agenda item 3

The minutes of the meeting on 5 February 2018 were accepted as being accurate by the Committee.

It was agreed that the recommendation for the SRA Board to advise each district to set up its own district flood group referred to in minute 26 should be put on the next agenda to confirm.

34 **Public question time** – agenda item 4

There were no public questions.

35 **Minutes of 7 March 2018 SRA Board meeting** – agenda item 5

The SRA Senior Manager updated the meeting regarding the last meeting of the Board of the Somerset Rivers Authority which took place on 7 March 2018. He explained that around £2.8m of local partner funding had been confirmed for 2018-19, the Board had approved the 2018-19 SRA Enhanced Programme, minor amendments were made to the memorandum of understanding, work was still progressing with precepting legislation and would be discussed later in the agenda.

The Panel noted the minutes.

**Key Project Updates - agenda item 6****a) Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Improvements Scheme**

The panel received a report detailing the progress made on the Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Scheme for Phase 2.

Taunton Deane Borough Council and the Environment Agency are working together to provide a long-term strategic solution to reduce flood risk to Taunton. The risk comes from the River Tone and 3 other tributaries that flow into the town centre. It is recognised that the risk to the town will get worse as climate change is predicted to increase maximum flood flows over time.

The Panel was informed that surveys, ground investigations, initial engagement with landowners, computer modelling, initial environmental surveys and concept designs to consider the potential components of the strategy had been completed. This had shown that major engineering work that would be required both in the town and in the flood storage area upstream to provide the desired level of protection for the next 100 years or so. The cost for both of these would be around £50m. A number of funding sources would be required for any long-term strategy. Achieving other non-flood risk benefits could be the key to unlocking other sources of funding.

Further points discussed included:

- The long-term strategy was likely to comprise a number of measures rather than a single solution
- A pragmatic approach to funding was likely to be most appropriate – individual schemes to be brought forward incrementally as part of the long-term project.
- A draft strategic plan should be ready for consultation by the end of 2018 identifying the most cost-effective components of work and the likely timetable
- Housing development applications and the associated flooding risks – each application had to be judged on its merits
- It was felt there should be better communication about the proposed schemes as there was often a perception of problems
- The villages of Isle Abotts and Isle Brewers being cut off when flooding in that area happens – the Environment Agency were aware of the situation and were looking into this further.

It was agreed that the SRA would give consideration to communication methods that could be used to address misconceptions.

It was also agreed there would be a further update from the Environment Agency. It would be useful for this to include the relevant related schemes.

The report was noted.

## **b) Sowy/King Sedgemoor Drain Enhancement Scheme Update**

Members were updated on the latest position regarding the Sowy/King Sedgemoor Drain scheme. Cost estimates for this scheme early in the year had significantly increased from £8m to £15m which had raised questions about affordability. Any significant delay could put at risk the Local Enterprise Partnership funding for the scheme of approximately £3.8m as the deadline for scheme delivery was March 2021.

The Environment Agency (EA) had identified work that could be carried out in the near future involving removal of another concrete obstruction near Dunball sluice and desilting around Parchey and Dunball Bridges. Works are due to start in Autumn 2018.

A review of the estimate for whole project was completed with the contractor but it remained unchanged at £12-£15m. The EA is working with the contractor to develop an alternative approach to delivery that would reduce or eliminate the need for transporting excavated material and therefore the need for access tracks (which are major components of the previous estimate).

Detailed modelling of the Oath to Burrowbridge dredge options is being carried out which will inform the final scheme proposal and the strategic approach to mitigation. The Internal Drainage Board is concurrently progressing the planned dredge which is reported separately.

The SRA board is meeting in June and there should be a range of options coming to that meeting.

Further discussion included:

- Looking at the feasibility of using a jetting strategy as opposed to dredging – this was not being investigated currently as the focus was on traditional methods and looking at ways of reducing costs.
- Whether local landowners were happy with the approach of keeping silt. It was felt in the main they were.
- Impact of diverting water coming down the River Tone would have critical outcomes for Taunton and Bridgwater.
- It was felt that following decisions at the Board meeting that the EA could move forward and would be able to report on progress at the next meeting.

**The Scrutiny Panel agreed to:**

- 1. Note the latest position with regards the development of the Sowy / KSD scheme**
- 2. Endorse the proposal to identify an approach to delivering increased conveyance on the Sowy/KSD that is affordable and deliverable within the funding constraints and time available, but that ultimately builds towards a comprehensive improvement scheme.**

- 3. Support the combined efforts of Environment Agency, Internal Drainage Boards and Natural England in identifying a package of works that delivers the desired benefits within the timeframe and funding of the LEP.**

**c) Brue update**

A Brue Plan workshop was held in early 2018 to investigate the potential for a more holistic and proactive approach to managing flooding in the Brue catchment and enable progress with projects.

The first phase on trees works was completed in February. It was agreed there should be a phased approach to the works over successive years avoiding full tree removal.

The next step is to develop a clearer understanding of what is needed in the catchment. Further work is needed to summarise the risks faced, identify the constraints and opportunities for successful SRA support. Following this there would be consultation with the wider group of stakeholders.

Further discussion about this included:

- This was a more difficult area to get progress on as the focus was mainly on the Parratt and there was less knowledge or desire to move forward with Brue projects.
- Further work with engaging with wider audiences was being undertaken with a further workshop planned
- Residents in Mendip had raised concerns with the district councillor regarding desilting and this was being investigated to see if this was viable and cost effective.
- The need to ensure that all work taking place via different groups would be reported back to the panel.
- Problems with Bleadon sluice and who is responsible for it as it is having an impact on other structures in Somerset. The EA had been asked for an update on this and it was agreed there would be another push to get this.

**The panel agreed the recommendations for approval by the SRA Board to:**

- 1. Note the ongoing work to develop a Brue Plan, aimed at taking a proactive approach to flood management in the Brue catchment and helping to progress SRA projects.**
- 2. Recognise the need for further data gathering and analysis to identify the main risks, issues and opportunities for flood management in the catchment.**
- 3. Note the continued intention to develop the Brue hydraulic model (previously approved.)**

#### **4. Approve continued work to prepare for and organise a Brue Plan workshop in summer 2018**

##### **37 Draft SRA End of Year Report 2017-18 - agenda item 7**

The End of Year Report 2017-18 gives a detailed account and analysis of the SRA's performance during 2017-18. It covers actions in the Enhanced Programme and gives an analysis based on SRA workstreams to help with understanding the finances. More information is included regarding rivers, watercourses and catchments associated with the locations of different works and there is new part included this time outlining progress against key targets of Somerset's 20 Year Flood Action Plan.

There were plans to further develop the website and to do more with social media and sending more press releases.

Further discussion about this included:

- Clarification on the work of the enforcement officer and whether local communities could take on further responsibilities to assist in this area
- Ensure there is a good communication link with the parish councils
- Members of the public did not understand the complexity of the work involved and this needed to be conveyed better through the media
- It would be useful to have the report focused on geographical areas to make it easier to read and more relevant to communities
- It was hoped there could be a wider distribution of the report in future.

The Panel noted the report.

##### **38 SRA Precepting Body – Update on the progress of the Rivers Authorities and Land Drainage Bill – agenda item 9**

It was agreed to bring this item forward and discuss the finance report as the last item as there was exempt information contained in the appendix.

The Panel was informed that David Warburton MP had presented the Rivers Authorities and Land Drainage Bill to Parliament on the 5<sup>th</sup> March for the first reading but the Bill had been unsuccessful at the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading stage on two occasions. Each time the Bill had not been debated as it was one of many bills due for consideration each day. The Bill had been resubmitted for its 2<sup>nd</sup> reading on 5<sup>th</sup> June. It was recommended that all possible steps should be taken to avoid the Bill being objected to on principle.

Members were concerned to hear an objection had been raised to the Bill and felt a letter should be written to the MP concerned outlining the importance of this.

**The Panel agreed to:**

1. **Note the report.**
2. **Delegate to the Chair, Vice Chair, and SRA Manager to write letters to the MP who objected to the Bill and also to other local MPs that it was felt could be helpful with the process and explain the importance of getting the Bill passed and ask for their support.**

39 **Finance report Q4 2017-18 - agenda item 8**

The Panel agreed to pass a resolution under Regulation 4 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 to exclude the press and public 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, within the meaning of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

The Panel received a report updating on the SRA's financial position as of the end of Quarter 4 2017-18. This had been revised to provide greater clarity on spending with a combined set of figures for all years showing total budget available at the start of the period, compared to what was spent and what was committed to be spent within that period. Spend on projects funded by Growth Deal Funding was reported on a separate line.

The total spend for 2017-18 was £3.6m. Further details of the breakdown was shown in Table A of the report. There was also further information regarding the financial performance committed spend and re-allocation of the remaining budget.

Members felt that a presentation in future would be useful to provide more clarity for them. If funding could be achieved through precepting in future this would enable the SRA to plan for the longer term and have greater certainty.

**The Panel agreed with the recommendations to the Board to:**

1. **Note the financial performance as at the end of Quarter 4 of 2017-18.**
2. **Approve the re-allocation of £39,384.81 remaining budget from completed actions to contingency**

40 **Date of next SRA Scrutiny Panel Meeting - agenda item 10**

It was agreed that the next SRA Scrutiny Panel meeting would be on Friday 1<sup>st</sup> February 2019.

41 **Any other business of urgency - agenda item 11**

There was a query regarding the progress of culvert orphan scheme to identify who was responsible for what culverts. The Internal Drainage Board was running a project on this and it was hoped this could be reported on in the future.

(The meeting closed at 4.13pm)

**Chair**  
**SRA Joint Scrutiny Panel**

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