

## ITEM 12

### Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Board Paper

### Somerset Rivers Authority Enhanced Programme of works 2023-24

#### RECOMMENDATION

The Somerset Rivers Authority Board is asked to:

1. Approve extending which organisations can bid for SRA funding for the 2023-24 Enhanced Programme beyond just the SRA partners.

#### Purpose of the item

To consider the potential benefits of extending bidding for Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) funds to a wider group of organisations than just the SRA partners and to seek approval from the SRA Board to accept bids from these organisations.

#### Background and context

The SRA Board approves an 'Enhanced Programme' of projects in March each year. These projects are funded using money raised through Council Tax specifically for the purposes of the SRA. The projects are focused on delivering the outcomes of the Somerset 20 Year Flood Action Plan (FAP).

The process for securing SRA funding is to submit a proposal for consideration in late August. The SRA team and Technical Group then assess the bids against FAP objectives. The SRA Board is then presented with a proposal for which projects should be considered for SRA funding at its December Board meeting.

Currently proposals for SRA funding have to be submitted by an SRA partner. The list of SRA partners consists of each of the organisations represented on the SRA Board plus the Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group SouthWest (FWAG SW). Each of the SRA partners has a Strategic Grant Agreement (SGA) with the SRA<sup>1</sup>. The SGA sets out the general conditions under which SRA funds can be used and provides for remedies in the event of issues with project delivery. Separate Grant Agreements for individual projects set out the detail of what each grant will be used for.

#### Current Status

Non-SRA partner organisations can bring forward proposals by working with an SRA partner but SRA Grant Agreements must be signed by the SRA partner. This pragmatic arrangement has allowed for a wider group of organisations to bring forward proposals for

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<sup>1</sup> The grant agreement is formally with Somerset County Council as the host authority for the SRA.

SRA funding. However, it can result in an SRA partner being in the position of being 'responsible' for a project when in actual fact it is being delivered by another organisation. This can result in project opportunities being missed if an SRA partner is not found to lead a bid on behalf of a stakeholder organisation.

Many organisations, including SRA partners, are currently experiencing significant pressures in terms of staff resources and capacity to deliver projects.

There are many fit and proper organisations that are not formal SRA partners working in Somerset delivering projects that can contribute to delivering the FAP objectives. Enabling these organisations to bid for SRA funds could increase the number of projects being delivered each year. It is proposed that only organisations that are either Risk Management Authorities<sup>2</sup>, public sector organisations or charitable & not for profit organisations are invited to bid for SRA funds. The SRA Board will continue to have final approval on which projects are funded each year.

Should the SRA Board support the principle of enabling more organisations to bid for SRA funds, advice will be sought from Somerset County Council legal and procurement services to establish appropriate criteria to ensure that any organisation bidding for funds is a fit and proper organisation with the financial controls and governance in place to appropriately manage any funds that are secured from the SRA.

Opening up SRA funding directly to a wider set of stakeholder organisations could increase the number of, and types of, projects being delivered that contribute to FAP objectives.

**Recommendation:**

The SRA Board is asked to:

1. Approve extending invitations for bids for SRA funding for the 2023-24 Enhanced Programme beyond just the SRA partners.

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<sup>2</sup> As defined in the Flood and Water Management Act 2010