

ITEM 8

Somerset Rivers Authority Board Paper

2025-26 Proposed SRA Enhanced Programme and Budget

RECOMMENDATION

The Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Board is asked to:

1. Provisionally approve the proposed 2025-26 SRA Enhanced Programme and Budget subject to final approval after precept funding is confirmed in February 2025 by Somerset Council.

Purpose of the item

To review and approve the proposed 2025-26 SRA Enhanced Programme and draft Budget.

Background and context

2025-26 will be the eleventh year that the SRA funds an 'Enhanced Programme' of actions to reduce the risk and impacts of flooding for Somerset residents and businesses. This extra level of protection is funded by a shadow precept raised through council tax. The Parrett and Axe Brue Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs) also contribute £10,000 each per annum. The final figure will be confirmed in February 2025, but it is estimated that the shadow precept and IDBs' contribution for the financial year 2025-26 will total approximately £3.133m.

Latest status

Seventeen grant applications with a total value of over £5.5m were submitted by SRA partners, the Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group SouthWest, Exmoor National Park Authority and Somerset Wildlife Trust in September 2024. It is not possible to fund all applications as there will be insufficient funds.

Grant applications were assessed using criteria reflecting the purpose and objectives set out in our 2024-2034 Strategy. SRA Workstream Leads reviewed all applications and met twice during November to agree which applications should be recommended to the SRA Board and how much funding each project should be offered. The recommendation was then reviewed by the Management Group on 6 December.

2025-26 Draft Budget Summary

Table A below presents the draft 2025-26 budget. The estimated income of the shadow precept and IDB contributions combined for is £3.132m.

The available contingency amount in Table A has been forecasted from the current Quarter 2 2024-25 Finance Paper (see ITEM 7a).

Table A

Forecast Income and Contingency	
2025-26 Precept - estimated	£3,112,887
Internal Drainage Boards	£20,000
Estimated available Contingency	£767,000
2025-26 Available Funds	£3,899,887
Proposed Expenditure, Starting Contingency	
SRA core staffing (4.2FTE) and overheads, legal, finance, governance, audit, etc.	£320,000
Community Flood Action Fund	£200,000
Contingency	£370,887
Proposed 2025-26 Enhanced Programme Total	£3,009,000
Total Expenditure	£3,899,887

Recommendation to the Board

Table B lists the projects that are recommended for approval. The 'location' column refers to the location a project takes place, but in many instances the benefits of projects are realised across a wide area and in more than one location.

SRA Reference	Title of Action	Workstream	Location
WW04	Bridgwater: Penarth Road sewer improvement and school SuDS	3	Somerset North
IDB19-26	River Parrett maintenance: Water Injection dredging, upper bank dredging and silt monitoring.	1	Somerset North
WW01	Local flood risk management measures across Somerset	3	Across Somerset
EA17-26	Bridgwater Tidal Barrier (contribution)	1	Somerset North

ENP01	Upper Barle catchment restoration	2	Somerset West
EA19	Main river enhanced maintenance	1	Levels and Moors
WW02	Frome: Lower Keyford surveys and drainage improvements	3	Somerset East
WW03	Watchet: Market Street SuDS design	3	Somerset West
FWLM01-26	Hills to Levels: Somerset Land Management and Natural Flood Management (NFM)	2	Across Somerset
WS5-26	Building Local Resilience	5	Across Somerset
LHA03-26	Highways enhanced proactive gully cleansing across Somerset	4	Across Somerset
WS5-26	Community flood warning system	5	Across Somerset
LP GD2b	River Sowy-King's Sedgemoor Drain (KSD) Enhancements Scheme (KSD Bank Raising)	1	Levels and Moors
CFAF-26	Community Flood Action Fund	N/A	Across Somerset

The 2025-26 Enhanced Programme, if approved, will see a mixture of projects funded across the county. There will be single site projects in Bridgwater, Frome and Watchet tackling sites at risk of flooding that have proved difficult to address for any single Flood Risk Management Authority. Rivers across the Somerset Levels and Moors will get extra maintenance to move / convey water away more quickly, allowing pumping stations to operate sooner and for longer, reducing the depth and duration of flooding. This maintenance work benefits communities far beyond the immediate location of the maintenance.

The multi-award-winning Hills to Levels project will again receive funding for natural flood management (NFM) and land management interventions across the county that tackle the sources and not just the symptoms of flooding by slowing the flow of water from the upper and mid-catchments. In the west of the county Exmoor National Park will use SRA funding to develop an innovative approach to river restoration that once completed will have extensive flood risk benefits and environmental benefits across a very special part of the Somerset landscape. Up to 25,000 highway gullies in areas susceptible to flooding will get an additional round of emptying, reducing the likelihood of flooding on the highway. The well-established and much appreciated Building Local Resilience (BLR) programme will see the SRA Community Engagement Officers supporting communities in a variety of ways to

be more informed, more resilient and ready to bounce back quicker from flooding. These roles are invaluable for giving at risk communities a voice, helping them to help themselves and augmenting the work that is possible by the Risk Management Authorities alone. To further add to what the BLR programme achieves the Community Flood Action fund will provide a source of funding for communities that have good ideas are organised and motivated to sort their local flooding issues by themselves.

Appendix 1 provides detailed descriptions for each grant proposal listed above.

A map showing project locations is provided at the end of this report.

Table C: Workstream summary

SRA actions are sorted into five workstreams, though in practice different elements sometimes overlap.

Workstream	Title	Value	% of Total
W1	Dredging and River Management	£1,740,000	54%
W2	Land Management including NFM	£429,000	13%
W3	Urban Water Management	£365,000	11%
W4	Resilient Infrastructure	£300,000	19%
W5	Building Local Resilience	£175,000	5%
CFAF	Community Flood Action Fund	£200,000	6%
		£3.209,000	100%

Summary

The 14 actions in Table B are recommended for approval as part of the 2025-26 SRA Enhanced Programme.

SRA funding will be confirmed during Somerset Council’s February budget setting meeting. The SRA Board will be asked to provide final approval for the 2025-26 Enhanced Programme and budget at its 8 March meeting.

RECOMMENDATION

The Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Board is asked to:

1. Provisionally approve the proposed 2025-26 SRA Enhanced Programme and Budget subject to final approval after precept funding is confirmed in February 2024 by Somerset Council.

Date: 16 January 2025

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Appendices:

Appendix 1: 2025-26 SRA proposed Enhanced Programme action summaries

Appendix 2: Confidential: 2025-26 SRA proposed Enhanced Programme action summaries with costs

