

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. Approve the proposed 2025-26 SRA Enhanced Programme and Budget.

Purpose of the item

To review and approve the 2025-26 SRA Enhanced Programme and 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 on March 5, but it is estimated that the 'shadow' precept and IDBs' contribution for the financial year 2025-26 will total approximately £3.133m.

Latest status

The Board was presented with essentially the same paper at its 24 January meeting. At that time the Enhanced Programme could only be provisionally approved as Somerset Council budget setting process had not completed. The council is scheduled to approve its budget, including the SRA 'shadow' precept on 5 March. This will allow the Board to fully consider this paper at its meeting on 7 March.

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 Budget Summary

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

The available contingency amount in Table A has been forecasted from the current Quarter 3 2024-25 Finance Paper (see ITEM 7).

Table A

| | |
|---|-------------------|
| Forecast Income and Contingency | |
| 2025-26 Precept - estimated | £3,112,887 |
| Internal Drainage Boards | £20,000 |
| Available Contingency (Subject to approval Q3 2024-25 Finance paper – ITEM 7) | £855,900 |
| 2025-26 Available Funds | £3,988,787 |
| | |
| 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 | £459,787 |
| Proposed 2025-26 Enhanced Programme Total | £3,009,000 |
| Total Expenditure | £3,988,787 |

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 |
|---------------|---|------------|------------------|
| CFAF-26 | Community Flood Action Fund | N/A | Across Somerset |
| IDB19-26 | River Parrett maintenance: Water Injection dredging, upper bank dredging and silt monitoring. | 1 | Somerset North |
| EA17-26 | Bridgwater Tidal Barrier (contribution) | 1 | Somerset North |
| EA19 | Main river enhanced maintenance | 1 | Levels and Moors |
| LP GD2b | River Sowy-King's Sedgemoor Drain (KSD) Enhancements Scheme (KSD Bank Raising | 1 | Levels and Moors |

| | | | |
|-----------|--|---|-----------------|
| ENP01 | Upper Barle catchment restoration | 2 | Somerset West |
| FWLM01-26 | Hills to Levels: Somerset Land Management and Natural Flood Management (NFM) | 2 | Across Somerset |
| WW04 | Bridgwater: Penarth Road sewer improvement and school SuDS | 3 | Somerset North |
| WW01 | Local flood risk management measures across Somerset | 3 | Across Somerset |
| WW02 | Frome: Lower Keyford surveys and drainage improvements | 3 | Somerset East |
| WW03 | Watchet: Market Street SuDS design | 3 | Somerset West |
| LHA03-26 | Highways enhanced proactive gully cleansing across Somerset | 4 | Across Somerset |
| WS5-26 | Building Local Resilience | 5 | Across Somerset |
| WS5-26 | Community flood warning system | 5 | Across Somerset |

The 2025-26 Enhanced Programme, once 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 and 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 5 March budget setting meeting.

RECOMMENDATION

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

1. Approve the proposed 2025-26 SRA Enhanced Programme and Budget.

Date: 25 February 2025

Author: David Mitchell, Somerset Rivers Authority Senior Manager

Appendices:

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

