

ITEM 8c

Somerset Rivers Authority Board Paper

Top-up to Fund for Community Resilience Equipment and Training

RECOMMENDATION

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

Approve funding of £60,000 to top-up the small grants fund operated by Somerset Prepared.

Purpose of the item

To request top-up funding for the small grants fund so that it can continue to support communities with grants for equipment and training to improve their flood resilience.

Background and context

The small grant grants fund has been running since 2013 in one form or another. It started as a collaboration between Somerset local authorities, Devon and Somerset Fire & Rescue Service, the Environment Agency and Safe South West, a registered charity with a focus on community safety. The original grant fund was supplied by the Fire Service. Since 2017, the fund has been co-ordinated by Somerset Prepared which is a partnership between Somerset Council, the SRA, Environment Agency, Police, Fire and Ambulance, Red Cross, Rotary International and other local partners.

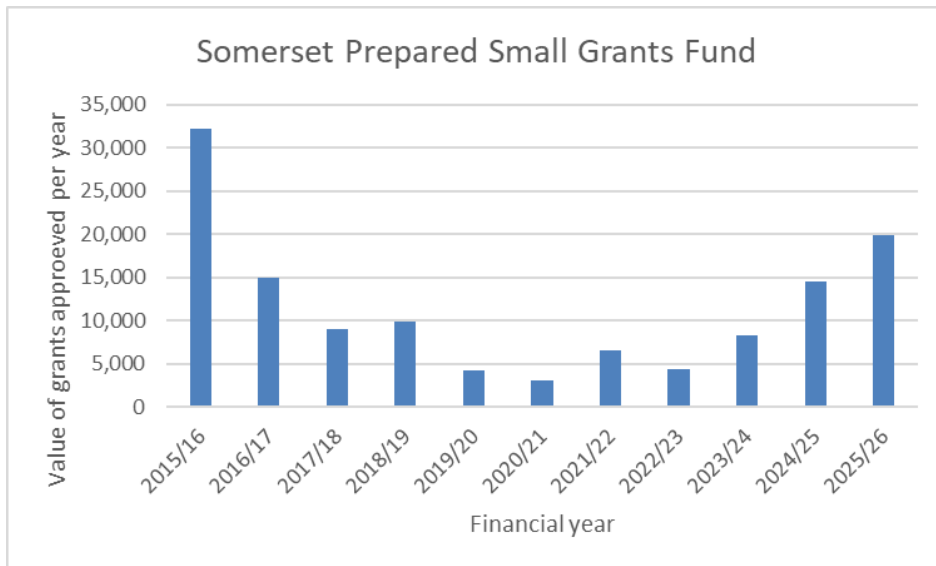
The small grants fund is available to assist with the cost of small capital items and associated training that directly supports activity described in a community emergency plan or community flood plan. Applications to the fund are open to any Parish Council, Town Council or formally constituted community group within the administrative county of Somerset.

The maximum grant amount is £5,000, and it is expected that the applicant contributes 20% of the project cost. The fund is designed to be quick and simple for communities to make an application and decisions are made by a grants panel which meets every quarter. Since the start of the scheme, 67 grants totalling £156,000 have been awarded to Somerset communities. The average grant award is £2,100.

Since 2015, the SRA has made contributions towards the fund. An allocation of £85,000 was made in 2015-16 as part of the initial round of Somerset's 20 Year Flood Action Plan. The scheme allows for applications for equipment such as defibrillators, but these are taken from other resources and not funded by the SRA.

Current Status

After a dip in activity during Covid, we have seen a steady increase in use of the fund. This has escalated since the appointment of the SRA Community Engagement Officers as they have been actively promoting the grant fund to communities.



The graph shows the value of grants approved per year over the last ten years. Note: the graph shows the full value of the grants awarded. It does include items ineligible for SRA funding such as defibrillators which are met from separate funding pots.

The most recent SRA top-up to the fund was £30,000 in 2024-25. It was expected that this would last for three financial years at an expected rate of £10,000 worth of grant approvals per year.

However, we saw an increase of demands on the fund in 2024-25 with grants to the total value of £14,500 being approved.

Also, the introduction of the SRA's Community Flood Action Fund (CFAF) in late 2024 has greatly increased the draw on the small grants fund. At the first CFAF grant panel meeting, it was recommended that five CFAF applications, totalling around £ 20,400, were referred to the Somerset Prepared small grants scheme. This was because they were considered to be more appropriate for the small grant scheme.

At the April 2025 meeting of the Somerset Prepared grants panel, three of the bids redirected from CFAF were approved, plus three other bids totalling £18,500. The other two bids redirected from CFAF, totalling around £6,000, required some further development but are likely to be ready for consideration at the July grants panel.

This means that the £30,000 awarded by the SRA has been fully committed within two years rather than three.

Request

That the SRA Board approve an allocation of funding to the Somerset Prepared grants scheme to enable support for communities to be continued at the current levels.

Without top-up funding, the fund will need to scale down its activities to a level proportionate with the residual Safe South West resources which are usually reserved for non-flood related items such as defibrillators. Also, if the small grants training and equipment fund is run down, then CFAF would have to consider these types of applications. It would be better to maintain the fund and process that is already well established for training and equipment grants and focus CFAF on different projects.

Recommendation

Approve funding of £60,000 to top-up the small grants fund operated by Somerset Prepared.

Date: 8 May 2025

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Below: See case studies in Appendix, pages 4 – 6.

Appendix: case studies – communities supported by the small grant fund



Ham Village Flood Defence Committee,
 This active flood group beside the River Tone received grants in 2019 and 2021 for flood protection equipment.

The newly formed **Three Villages Flood Group** – Mudford, Ashington and Chilton Cantello – received funding in 2024 to kit out their new flood wardens with high visibility protective clothing, torches and other equipment.



Oake Parish Council have developed a very detailed community emergency plan complete with a team of trained volunteers. Oake had grant funding in 2023 for equipment including PPE and radios.

A representative spoke at the 2024 Somerset Prepared community resilience event to inspire other communities.



Moorland, Fordgate & West Yeo Flood Group

This group was formed as part of recovery from the Levels and Moors floods in 2013-14.

The Flood Group received small grant funding in 2015-16 and again in 2017-18. As well as the PPE for flood wardens, they purchased flood protection equipment including sandbags, warning signs and emergency lights.



(Left) Cheddar is one of the EA's rapid response catchments. **Cheddar Parish Council** received support towards the costs of sandbag filling device and other flood equipment.



(Right) Sampford Brett, near Williton, is subject to surface water flooding. **Sampford Brett Parish Council** used their grants in 2018-19 and 2023-24 to buy equipment including flood sacks, tools and PPE. And a shed to store the equipment in for quick access during a flood.



The village of Martock is regularly affected by flooding. **Martock Flood Group** are very active and experienced and regularly deploy to help protect their community.

Martock Flood Group received grants in 2015-16, 2021-22 and 2022-23 for flood equipment including hydrosnakes and other flood barriers.



Appendix 2: facts and figures



Map showing distribution of Somerset Prepared small grants up to 2024-25. Note: some communities have applied for more than one grant.

Popular equipment items

Sandbags, sandbag fillers, gel bags, hydro-snakes (right) and other flood barriers etc
 Tools: shovels, wheelbarrows, torches, brooms.
 Radios and walkie-talkies.
 Wet weather clothes, boots and other personal protective equipment.



Somerset Prepared Small Grants

- Small capital items and associated training that directly supports activity described in a Community Emergency Plan or Community Flood Plan.
- Open to any Parish/Town Council or formally constituted community group in Somerset.
- Applicants must represent a local community and use grants in such a way that provides benefit to all its members.
- Maximum grant of £5,000.
- Minimum local funding contribution of 20% (50% for defibrillators.)
- Not for goods and services that are the responsibility of public bodies to provide.
- On-going maintenance of purchased items is sole responsibility of the applicant.

How to apply: www.somersetprepared.org.uk/getsupport/funding-support/
 Grant Panel reviews applications quarterly during January, April, July and October.