

Somerset Rivers Authority Board Paper

Community Flood Action Fund (CFAF) 18-Month Programme Review

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Note the progress of the Community Flood Action Fund (CFAF)
2. Consider whether any changes are required to the process and programme.

Purpose of the item

To review the performance and impact of the SRA's Community Flood Action Fund during its first 18 months of operation and identify lessons learned to inform future delivery.

Background and context

Before March 2025, SRA partners felt there are many small-scale interventions that could offer localised improvements to flood risk and that could be undertaken by organisations other than risk management authorities. A Community Flood Action Fund was established by the Somerset Rivers Authority in December 2024 to support community-led projects that reduce flood risk and improve local resilience. Eligible organisations include constituted community groups, parish and town councils, schools, not-for-profit organisations such as charities and community interest groups, environmental non-government organisations.

CFAF provides grants of between £3,000 and £20,000 for practical projects that can be delivered quickly and with clear local benefits. £20,000 was set as the upper limit that can be applied for, to limit the complexity of projects that can come forward and to make the assessment process consistent and simple.

Fund Objectives

CFAF was designed to:

- Support community-led flood risk management
- Enable practical action to address local flooding issues
- Increase local resilience to flooding and climate change
- Encourage partnership working and community engagement
- Promote sustainable, long-term management of flood risk

Current Status

Applications are invited quarterly. To date, there have been seven application rounds, with the most recent deadline on 25 August. This report covers the first six rounds, as applications submitted in the latest round have not yet been assessed.

1. Statistics to date

Applications – 6 rounds	Number
Applications received	47
Applications approved	21
Applications rejected	12
Applications invited to resubmit	4
Applications referred for alternative funding	10
Successful applications rate	45%

Reasons for Rejection

- Ineligible organisation
- Overall project budget more than £20,000
- Works in the specified location(s) already receiving grant funding from SRA eg. Enhanced Gully emptying and drain jetting
- Application doesn't fit criteria or give enough information ie Data on recent flooding

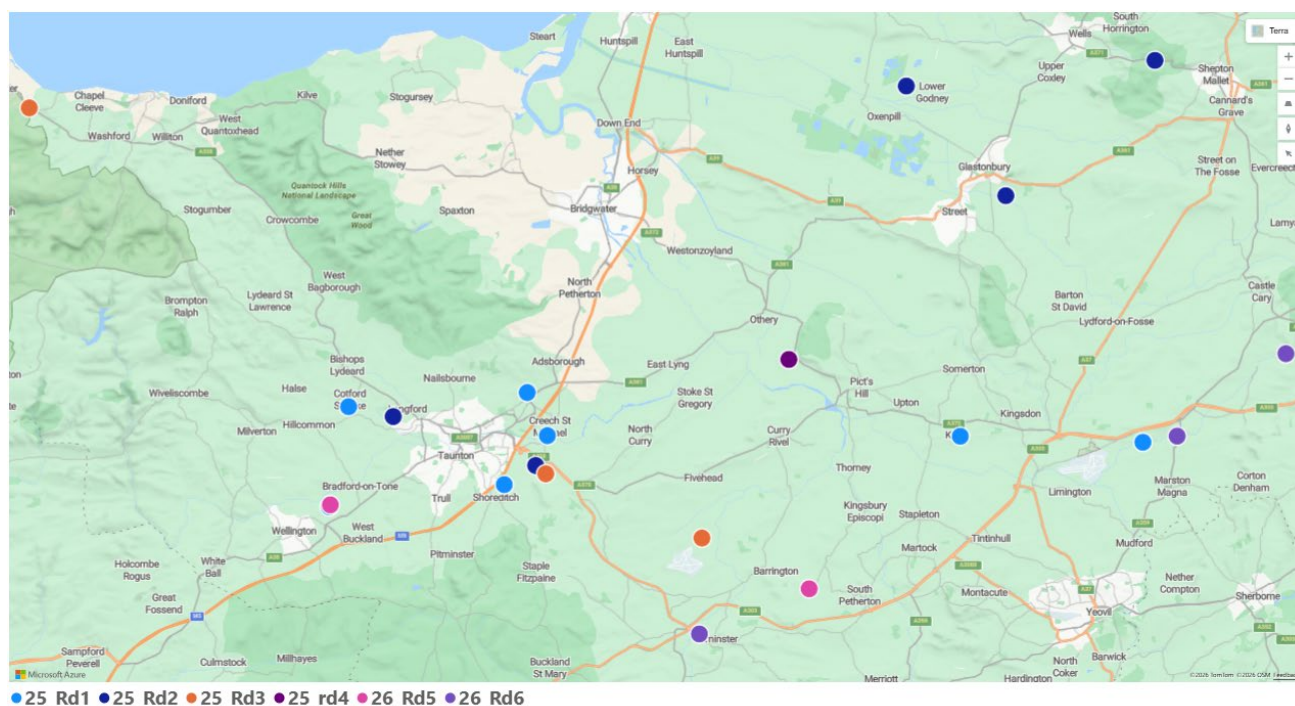
Reasons for Referral for Alternative Funding

- Applications were referred when proposed works were judged a better fit for other SRA-funded initiatives, such as the Hills to Levels natural flood management project, or the Equipment and Training Grants administered through Somerset Prepared.

Organisation	Number
Parish / town council	39
School	2

Community group	2
Charitable organisation	4

Geographic spread of approved CFAF Projects



2. Funded Projects Statistics to date

Type of works funded	Number
Watercourse maintenance such as desilting or ditch maintenance and vegetation / weed clearance	14
Desilting of existing attenuation area	2
Culvert or drain clearance	6
Enhancement to existing or new drainage infrastructure	4
Purchase of pump	1

Note: The number of works funded exceeds the number of projects approved because several projects included more than one type of activity.

Analysis

The data suggests that CFAF is supporting both preventative maintenance and targeted local interventions that help communities address known flooding and drainage issues.

3. Project Delivery Progress

Status	Number
Completed	9
Partially completed	2
Delayed	5
In progress	5

3.1 Reasons for Delay

While most funded projects have been completed or are in progress, a number have experienced delays. These delays are largely linked to the practical challenges of delivering small-scale flood risk works in local watercourse where permissions, site conditions and contractor availability can affect delivery timescales.

- **Consents and permissions:** Some schemes require landowner agreement, statutory consents, environmental permits or confirmation of responsibilities before works can start.
- **Weather and site conditions:** Several projects are dependent on suitable ground and watercourse conditions.
- **Ecological constraints:** Some works need to be scheduled around ecological considerations, such as nesting birds, protected species, fish spawning periods or seasonal vegetation constraints.
- **Contractor availability and capacity:** Community applicants often rely on specialist contractors or local suppliers with limited availability.

4. Financial Performance

Fund Allocation Summary	Amount	%
Total budget allocation	£520,000	100%
Total grants awarded	£211,242	41%

Remaining budget	£308,758	59%
Grants paid to date (completed works)	£80,722	16%

5.

Programme Outcomes and Impact

The first 18 months of CFAF demonstrate that relatively small grants can support practical, locally-led interventions which contribute to flood risk reduction, community preparedness and longer-term resilience. The Fund has enabled communities to address issues that may be too localised or small-scale to be delivered through larger capital programmes, but which are important to residents, local infrastructure and community confidence. The outcomes set out below are based on completed and progressing projects.

Flood Risk Reduction

- **Improved drainage and conveyance capacity:** Funded works such as desilting, ditch maintenance, culvert clearance and vegetation management have helped restore the ability of local drainage systems and watercourses to move water more effectively during periods of heavy rainfall.
- **Reduced local flood risk:** By targeting known problem locations, CFAF projects have supported local reductions in surface water, drainage and watercourse-related flood risk, particularly where blockages, silt build-up or poor maintenance were contributing to repeat issues.
- **Better management of watercourses and drainage assets:** The Fund has encouraged applicants to identify local assets, understand maintenance needs and take practical action to improve their condition, supporting a more proactive approach to flood risk management.
- **Development of maintenance plans:** Several projects have prompted communities to consider how completed works will be maintained in future, helping to embed longer-term ownership and reduce the risk that benefits are lost over time.
- **Greater understanding of riparian responsibilities:** Through project development, applicants and landowners have gained a clearer understanding of responsibilities for watercourse and drainage maintenance.

Community Resilience

- **Increased local understanding of flood risk:** The application and delivery process has helped communities better understand the sources, pathways and impacts of local flooding, as well as the practical measures that can reduce risk.

- **Stronger community ownership of local flood issues:** CFAF has supported communities to move from identifying problems to developing and delivering practical solutions, strengthening local confidence and ownership.
- **Better preparedness for future events:** Practical works, improved local knowledge and clearer maintenance arrangements all contribute to communities being better prepared for future flooding or prolonged wet weather.
- **Long-term ownership arrangements:** The requirement for applicants to consider ongoing management has encouraged clearer responsibility for future maintenance, supporting the sustainability of funded works beyond initial delivery. However, as the Fund has operated for only 18 months, it is too early to assess whether these arrangements will be sustained over the longer term.
- **Improved links with partner organisations:** CFAF has encouraged closer working between communities, parish and town councils, landowners, contractors and relevant flood risk management partners, helping to build relationships that can support future action.
- **Enhanced understanding of assets and responsibilities:** Project development has helped identify drainage assets, maintenance gaps and responsibility issues, providing useful learning for both communities and partners in managing local flood risk.

6. Case Studies “in their own words”

Feedback from funded communities provides supporting evidence of the difference CFAF supported projects are making at local level. The following examples demonstrate how relatively small, community-led interventions can improve drainage and watercourse performance and strengthen local ownership of future maintenance.

"The extent of flooding on roads and parishes around us... leaves me in no doubt that CFAF work has transformed the flood risk in the targeted area... more effective than we could have conceivably hoped... Many thanks for your support and funding."

Cllr Graeme Watt, Stoke St Mary Parish Council

"The project was to clear blocked ditch... completed in full... within budget... within planned timescale... The parish council working with the IDB will ensure the ditch remains free from obstruction and is maintained on an annual basis... The response from parishioners has been overwhelmingly positive..."

Cllr Philip Sharrett, Aller Parish Council

"Without doubt the desilting work has demonstrated some improvements but has not completely resolved the flood risk. Asham Lane has flooded twice in 2026, but on both occasions, it has been noticeable how much more quickly the water has dissipated."

Jill Larcombe, West Buckland Parish Council

Photographic and anecdotal evidence from completed projects presents a balanced picture. Funded works may not remove flood risk entirely, but communities have reported that water dissipates more quickly following heavy rainfall, local drainage assets are operating more effectively, and arrangements for ongoing maintenance are clearer. Applicants have also reported positive responses from residents and improved working relationships with relevant partners.

Individual case studies provide further detail on the issues addressed, the works undertaken and the outcomes experienced by communities. They help demonstrate the wider benefits of the Fund and give prospective applicants practical examples of the types of projects and outcomes that CFAF can support.

More information on CFAF completed projects here: [Community Flood Action Fund successes - Somerset Rivers Authority](#)

7. Lessons Learned

What Has Worked Well?

- The application process is simple and proportionate, making it accessible to smaller organisations.
- The community-led approach has enabled local organisations to identify the flood risk issues and develop practical measures.
- The quarterly application rounds and assessment process have supported relatively quick decision-making, giving applicants timely feedback and enabling approved projects to move into delivery without significant delay.
- Improved access to funding for smaller organisations, enabling them to deliver practical local flood risk projects that may not otherwise have been possible.

Challenges Encountered

- Some applicants found it difficult to understand which maintenance activities would have the greatest impact on reducing flood risk, particularly where technical knowledge was needed to assess local drainage, watercourse or surface water issues.
- The need to secure consents, permissions or permits has delayed some projects, especially where landowner agreement, environmental considerations or input from more than one organisation was required before works could begin.
- Some applicants have limited capacity to develop and deliver projects, with applicants often relying on volunteers or small parish and community groups who may have limited time or experience of managing grant-funded works.

Areas for Improvement

- Strengthen communications and promotion so that eligible organisations are more aware of the Fund.
- Provide additional case studies and worked examples to show applicants what a strong project looks like, how benefits can be evidenced and how completed works can contribute to local flood resilience.
- Investigate proportionate ways to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation framework by improving baseline information, project completion reporting and evidence of outcomes, so that the impact of funded works can be assessed more consistently over time.

Recommendations

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Date: 2 September 2026

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