

**Draft minutes of
Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Board Meeting**

held on 5 June 2026

at The Canalside, Marsh Lane, Bridgwater, TA6 6LQ.

Members of SRA Board:

Cllr Mike Stanton - *Chair*,
Somerset Council
Tony Bradford - *Vice-Chair*, Parrett Internal
Drainage Board (IDB)
Cllr Steve Ashton, Somerset Council
Anthony Betty, Parrett IDB
Cllr Mike Caswell, Somerset Council
Ian Collins, Wessex Regional Flood
& Coastal Committee
Claire Newill, Natural England
Cllr Nick O'Donnell, Somerset Council
Cllr Claire Sully, Somerset Council
Wendy Welland, Axe Brue IDB
David Tratt, Axe Brue IDB
Matt Wheeldon, Wessex Water
Ian Withers, Environment Agency
Cllr Ros Wyke, Somerset Council

In Attendance:

Bel Deering, Somerset Rivers
Authority (SRA)
Caroline Dunn, SRA
Ross Edwards, Environment Agency
Paul Elliston, SRA
Piers Hooper, Environment Agency
Sam Hitchcott, Somerset Council
Jonathan Hudston, SRA
David Mitchell, SRA
Iain Sturdy, Somerset Drainage
Boards Consortium
Nicola Dawson, Somerset Council

Apologies:

Andrew Gilling, Axe Brue IDB
James Divall, Somerset Council
Donna Gowler, Natural England

ITEM 1 INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Chair Cllr Mike Stanton welcomed SRA Board members and members of the public to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Andrew Gilling, Axe Brue Internal Drainage Board (IDB) and officers Donna Gowler, Natural England, and James Divall, Somerset Council.

ITEM 2 ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR

David Mitchell, SRA Manager, said that elections for the roles of SRA Chair and Vice Chair had to be held every two years. Nominations could be proposed and seconded by Board Members present - and only Board members present could vote.

For Chair, nominations were made for the current Chair Cllr Mike Stanton and current Vice-Chair Tony Bradford. Both confirmed their willingness to stand. After both addressed the Board, Cllr Stanton was elected as Chair. He thanked members for their support and expressed his commitment to continuing the work of the SRA, particularly in addressing flooding risks across Somerset and maintaining collaborative engagement with partners.

For Vice Chair, Tony Bradford was proposed, seconded and elected. He thanked members for their confidence and pledged to support the Chair and contribute to the effective delivery of the SRA's priorities.

ITEM 3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

SRA Chair Cllr Mike Stanton declared his membership of Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium and his role as a Director of the Association of Drainage Authorities, representing Local Authorities.

SRA Vice-Chair Tony Bradford declared an interest in anything related to the King's Sedgemoor Drain as he owns land on both sides of it.

ITEM 4a MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes from the previous SRA Board meeting on 20 March 2026 were agreed as accurate.

ITEM 4b MATTERS ARISING AND ACTION LOG

David Mitchell updated Board members on several action points arising from their 20 March meeting:

1. Update Board members' register of interests. Mr Mitchell said that registers of interest had been received from Somerset Council members. Other members were asked to submit theirs.
2. Amend draft minutes of previous meeting to reflect comments. Mr Mitchell said this had been done.
3. Confirm Board members can access Project and Performance Power Bi reports. This was confirmed.
4. Schedule a discussion/workshop on Natural Flood Management (NFM). Ian Collins, Wessex Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (WRFCC), said there was to be an NFM-specific WRFCC meeting, so the two meetings could be combined.
5. Organise River Brue modelling next steps meeting. Mr Mitchell said this would be covered later through Item 11.

6. Update the Board on progress with review of 2026 flooding incident and actions requested by Emma Hardy, Minister for Flood and Water. The Chair said this would be covered through Item 7.
7. Environment Agency to provide an estimate of costs incurred in response to 2026 Flooding. This was also to be covered in Item 7.
8. Undertake a one-year review of the Community Flood Action Fund (CFAF). Caroline Dunn, SRA project & performance officer, said there would be a presentation at the SRA Board meeting on 11 September.
9. Address the potential change to highways gully-emptying funding request that could result in £350k being available. This was to be discussed in Item 10.

ITEM 5 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

One question was submitted via email to the SRA Board, by West Monkton Parish Council. The Environment Agency answered at the meeting and also by email. For the question and the answer, see Appendix A to these minutes, pages 12-13.

The Chair asked members of the public who were present if they had any questions for the Board. Andrea Hine asked if it would be possible to have permanent pumps installed at Elson's Clyse to help alleviate flooding at Fordgate near Moorland. Ms Hine outlined how Park Brook brought water down from the North Petherton area and how it interacted with Northmoor Main Drain and rhynes in Fordgate. She said that as soon as there was a storm or heavy rain Park Brook rose rapidly, and this had the effect of causing flooding in Fordgate. She was concerned this would happen again this coming winter and with planning applications progressing for thousands more houses, she feared even more flooding in future.

Points raised during the following discussion:

Iain Sturdy, Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium, said that many people were keen for a new pump to be installed at Elson's Clyse, an outfall into the River Parrett which had been improved about 10 years ago but needed considerable maintenance. He wondered whether it might not be a better idea to install additional pumps at Northmoor Pumping Station, because greater volumes of water could be dealt with there, Elson's Clyse being more limited. Mr Sturdy felt that a thorough investigation into issues such as catchment flow mechanisms would help to pinpoint the best answers. He said that over the last year he had discussed various possibilities for action with Somerset Council, particularly as regards sheer volumes of water, which were causing properties to flood. He favoured the development of a strategic plan, involving the council and developers. Mr Sturdy concluded by saying that matters were complex: it would help if they could all be pulled together into a briefing note so that everyone could understand the system locally and how it worked.

David Mitchell said the SRA Board had approved funding of £140,000 for a study to understand the downstream impacts of new developments. The study area was expected to include the Somerset Levels and Moors.

Tony Bradford said that councils had been very naive about new developments. Mr Bradford expressed concern about new developments being built around areas like Taunton and Yeovil without adequate investment to mitigate flood risk downstream on the moors. He said that as part of the planning process money should be compulsorily put aside for flood resilience. For example, for upgrading pumping stations at Currymoor and Northmoor. Anthony Betty, Parrett IDB, said he supported this view.

Cllr Ros Wyke suggested that pumping costs should be covered in a briefing note and that it would help if people knew more about the costs associated with bringing in additional pumps when needed versus costs and infrastructure required for permanent ones.

Cllr Steve Ashton made the point that for new developments to get approved they must already prove that they have a neutral impact on water run-off. Mr Ashton explained that any planning requirements for offsite mitigation have to be able to prove it is needed or it would generate appeals. He said that it was not right to say that new developments *per se* would generate increased run-off; he also acknowledged that this was not a popular position to take.

Iain Sturdy said the main issue for the moors was water volume. SuDS and other measures would not work if the area they were to drain was full and very slow to drain. The effective way to deal with this was pumping. Mr Sturdy acknowledged that linking new pumps to the electricity grid would be expensive. However, he did not feel that all options for powering pumps had been thoroughly looked at. He said that pumping was pretty much the only way to remove water unless an area was completely adapted. In the absence of more permanent pumps Mr Sturdy said that infrastructure necessary for quicker deployment of temporary pumps should be installed.

Piers Hooper, Environment Agency, said the Environment Agency had looked very carefully at how to optimise the use of the funds it currently gets for the Levels and Moors. Under current funding rules the agency would not be able to make a successful business case for more permanent pumps on the Levels and Moors.

Wendy Welland, Axe Brue IDB, asked who was responsible for maintaining attenuation ponds.

Matt Wheeldon, Wessex Water, said that different people could be responsible, such as Wessex Water or a management company. It could often be the case that residents had to pay Wessex Water for the adoption of pipes and a management

company for pond maintenance. He said there had been two Government reviews of this subject, as new drainage assets were not always being maintained well enough, because management companies set up by developers were responsible and not a large central organisation like Wessex Water.

Dr Paul Elliston, SRA community team, said that in his experience of meeting Somerset communities, this whole topic was raised more than almost any other. He outlined a proposal for adding gauges onto attenuation ponds in new developments to ensure they were working correctly. He was liaising with the Environment Agency's and Somerset Council's planning teams to see if this could be progressed.

Cllr Mike Caswell said that, for many years, drainage rates in the Bridgwater area had exceeded other areas. Water flowed down from places such as the Mendips and the Tone and Parrett catchments, leaving the Sedgemoor area to get rid of the water and manage the system. Cllr Caswell said that as large developments continued to be built all over Somerset, water had to go somewhere and he thought this is where it would continue to end up. He concluded that organisations needed to take responsibility for dealing with these issues.

Cllr Claire Sully felt this has been one of the most important debates that she had heard since joining the SRA. She raised concerns about what future generations would have to deal with. She thought SRA Board members should speak up for Somerset residents, communities and people directly affected.

Claire Newill, Natural England, suggested that it would be good for the Board to have a council briefing about catchment mechanisms, investments in flood risk infrastructure, and the council's development of a Local Plan and for the Board to be able to make representations about such matters.

The Chair summarised the Board's discussion about the complexity of the planning process with multiple organisations involved, not all statutory consultees, and lack of public faith that new developments mitigated their flood risk.

Ian Withers, Environment Agency, added that pressure to facilitate increased housing growth made the situation even more challenging. He said that all organisations in the room had a role to play in improving the situation.

The Chair reiterated that these matters were complex. However, for the next Board meeting, he said that a realistic and specific proposal should be drafted that would feed into Somerset Council planning. He noted that such a proposal needed to have input from all partners of the SRA. The Chair proposed that a working group should be set up before the September Board meeting and report its findings to the December Board meeting.

ITEM 6 CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair said that he was going to attend the forthcoming Flood and Coast conference in Liverpool, where Floods Minister Emma Hardy was to give the opening speech. Cllr Stanton said that when the Minister had visited the Langport and Muchelney area in February she had been extremely interested in, and concerned by, the flooding there.

ITEM 7 2026 FLOODING

Nicola Dawson, Somerset Council, and Ross Edwards, Environment Agency, updated the Board about the work being done to review the response to the flooding experienced in Somerset in January and February 2026.

Ms Dawson said that January 2026 had been the second wettest month on record since 1871, second only to 2014. She said the Major Incident that was declared on 27 January went on until 19 February 2026.

Ms Dawson talked about feedback received, in particular at Local Community Network meetings for Crewkerne and Ilminster, Levels and Moors, Chard and Blackdowns, Avalon and Poldens and Hestercombe, and at events in Burrowbridge and Bathpool. People had called for clearer, more consistent communications to residents on the doorstep and more effective information sharing, especially for vulnerable residents. However, there was also praise for effective partnership working during a long-lasting incident and good briefings from the Met Office and Environment Agency.

Ms Dawson said that following Bathpool area flooding, a Section 19 flood investigation was underway, with a target date for completion of 31 August. On the Levels and Moors, no single community had hit the threshold for a Section 19 report, however Somerset Council had decided to produce a Levels and Moors Report as a record of the event and to help shape future planning.

Next steps were to continue activities to support communities and build resilience through events such as flood cafes and flood workshops. Ms Dawson said that Somerset Council and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) would also be discussing funding opportunities.

Ross Edwards said that after a flood, the Environment Agency initiated a recovery programme, with six main strands: Assets, Communication and Engagement, Data and Information, Plans and Procedures, Health, Safety and Wellbeing, and Debrief and Lessons Learnt.

He said the agency locally had applied nationally for multi-million-pound recovery funding. An answer was expected imminently. If this bid was successful and met in full, the Agency would be able to repair most assets and to make significant changes

to temporary pumping capability, so it was smoother and faster. Mr Edwards said the agency was fully committed to the Level and Moors being a pump-managed system and also to assisting the Parrett IDB with its study into the potential for pumps at Dunball and providing all necessary information for that.

Mr Edwards said this year's flooding had cost the Environment Agency about £5million for Somerset and more for the whole of Wessex.

Points raised:

- Anthony Betty said no properties had flooded in Othery, but the village was heavily impacted when the A361 was closed and residents had to get to Taunton through a long detour via Bridgwater. He said the parish council had not been asked about this issue. Mr Betty also asked if the £5million cost cited by Mr Edwards was the cost to the Environment Agency, or to Somerset, and thereby for example including residents who had to buy extra fuel for longer journeys because of road closures. Mr Edwards said it was the cost to the Environment Agency, but he added that the Agency was very aware of additional costs to residents when building cases for flood alleviation improvements.
- Iain Sturdy asked whether the £5million was the Environment Agency's operational cost, or damages cost as a result of the flooding. Mr Edwards said it was the operational cost. Mr Sturdy added that it was great news that the Environment Agency had secured funding to invest in existing pumping stations: this would help to secure the future of some Somerset pumping stations. Ian Withers thanked Mr Sturdy for highlighting this: he also noted how successfully teams had worked collaboratively to get works underway.
- Cllr Ros Wyke thanked Mr Edwards for highlighting the River Brue in his presentation. She said that in previous floods the River Brue had been fortunate in comparison to the River Parrett. She thought that lessons should be learned from this, highlighting the need for action to be taken earlier rather than later.
- Tony Bradford said that he did not think temporary pumps were working, otherwise there would not have been an emergency declared. He argued that pumps needed to be ready and waiting for another event. He acknowledged how hard the Environment Agency had worked but he thought there needed to be a better solution before this happened again.

The Chair thanked all for their comments.

ITEM 8 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The SRA's community team - Dr Bel Deering and Dr Paul Elliston - gave a presentation about SRA community engagement activities.

Dr Deering outlined the SRA's approach to community engagement. She said it was important that local residents, parish and town councils, and other community organisations and stakeholders should be actively involved in discussions about flood risk management, as they had local knowledge and could help to deliver SRA objectives.

The SRA's community team therefore organised or attended a wide range of events and meetings across Somerset to help raise awareness, to encourage and assist with the development of collaborative approaches, and to promote the work of the SRA and the grants and opportunities it offered.

Dr Elliston said that in 2025-26 he and Dr Deering had driven 9975 miles. They had attended 10 training sessions or workshops, 6 Act to Adapt workshops, 24 flood group/flood group network meetings, 3 Somerset Prepared community resilience roadshows, 1 business resilience event, 18 LCN and parish council meetings and 76 public events. They had made 48 community visits and 11 school visits. This all equated to 4856 meaningful conversations. Dr Elliston said it was good to maintain regular dialogue with residents and communicate clearly and consistently, especially following significant flooding. He gave examples of positive feedback from residents.

Points raised:

- Cllr Claire Sully thanked both for their presentation. She said communities were the SRA's best asset. Helping to make them more resilient was a priority for Somerset Council: Cllr Sully offered her help with anything needed.
- Cllr Ros Wyke thought a pilot study on road closures was a brilliant initiative, she asked whether there was a time scale for it. Dr Elliston said there was no time scale: there needed to be flooding to see how it would work.

The Chair thanked Dr Deering and Dr Elliston for their presentation and for the continuing work being undertaken to engage with communities across Somerset.

ITEM 9A FINANCE REPORT AND ENHANCED PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Sam Hitchcott, SRA Finance Business Partner, introduced her paper. She presented the financial position as at the end of Quarter 4 2025-26. At the start of the year, total available funds were £7.265m, consisting of £4.130m allocated to existing projects and contingency carried forward from 2025-26 and £3.133m raised through the 2025-26 precept.

Ms Hitchcott said that expenditure during Quarter 4 of 2025-26 totalled £1.206m: 4.95% of funds were spent on the administration and staffing of the SRA, 0.4% was spent on SRA core work and development and 95.1% was spent on projects and activities in the SRA Enhanced Programme.

She added that, if all financial movements were approved by the SRA Board, the contingency would increase by £169k from £915k to £1.084m. Contingency funds would then equal 15% of Local Partner funds (currently 13%), with the remainder allocated to specific schemes. Ms Hitchcott said contingency was currently bigger than usual.

There were no questions.

As recommended, the SRA Board noted the financial performance as at the end of Quarter 4 of 2025-26.

The Board also approved the re-allocation of funds to contingency as per Part Two.

ITEM 9b FINANCE UPDATE:2026–27 FINANCE SUMMARY

Ms Hitchcott said the paper set out the financial position of the SRA as of 1 April 2026. For 2026-27, £3,190,293 had been raised through council tax for the Somerset Rivers Authority's 'shadow precept'. £20,000 was contributed by the Parrett & Axe Brue Internal Drainage Boards. The total income from new funds for 2026-27 was therefore £3,210,293. Ms Hitchcott said new funds got added to the SRA's contingency (£1.084m) and to SRA's fund carried forward from 2025-26 into 2026-27 (£1,575,400). 'Carry forward' funds were allocated to projects underway, thus 'all funds' for use by the SRA in 2026-27 and beyond totalled £5,870,000.

There were no questions.

As recommended, the SRA Board noted the financial position of the SRA as at 1 April 2026.

ITEM 9c QUARTER 4 2025–26 PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Caroline Dunn, SRA Project and Performance Officer, updated the Board with details of the delivery of projects and activities in the SRA Enhanced Programme. She explained that the performance monitoring framework enabled the Board to assess progress against approved objectives and provided assurance regarding the delivery of outcomes. The paper shows whether projects that partners are delivering are behind schedule, ahead of schedule, on track etc.

Ms Dunn drew attention to table B that summarises project status. Ms Dunn provided details on why some projects show as more than three years behind schedule. The Chair acknowledged that projects do suffer from delays but said it is important that these projects are completed.

Ms Dunn explained that as this was the final report for the financial year there was some additional information in the report showing all projects and activities since 2015 and their status. She encouraged Board members to read the report and explore the associated Power Bi report in their own time. Ms Dunn added that this

report provided data on outputs but the SRA Annual Report for 2025-26 would tell more of the stories behind the data. The Annual Report would be available by the time of the next Board meeting.

The Chair thanked Ms Hitchcott and Ms Dunn for their reports and acknowledged the continued work of officers in managing both the SRA's finances and programme delivery.

As recommended, the SRA Board noted the overall delivery status of the schemes and activities within the current SRA Enhanced Programme for Quarter 4 2025-26 and the whole year 2025-26.

ITEM 10 2026–27 SRA UNALLOCATED ENHANCED PROGRAMME FUNDS

David Mitchell explained that in the original 2026-27 SRA Enhanced Programme approved by the Board in March 2026, there was a £350,000 Somerset Council Highways Department scheme for Enhanced Gully Cleansing. At that time, it was thought possible that Highways might no longer need this money because of extra Somerset Council investment into additional gully emptying. When this supposition was subsequently confirmed, the Highways scheme was withdrawn. As a result, Mr Mitchell said that the SRA Management Group had been considering other options for spending that £350,000. Proposals now recommended for funding were: Frome Headwaters Natural Flood Management (NFM) programme £26,500, Community Flood Investigation Reports Pilot £20,000, Bathpool Pumping Improvement Project additional contribution £100,000 and Additional Main River Maintenance £30,000.

Mr Mitchell said these four schemes would account for £176,000. If the Board approved this allocation, this would leave a new total of £908,000 in contingency, a sum judged to be more than enough for SRA purposes.

Points raised:

- Cllr Ros Wyke asked for more information about why Highways no longer wanted extra gully emptying funding from the SRA. David Mitchell said that this year the Highways Department was using updated flood risk modelling data from the Environment Agency. This showed more areas flooding more often, and that increased the number of gullies needing to be cleared every year. As additional funding had been provided by the council for this, highways officers felt as though they could not ask the SRA for more, though they might return to requesting SRA funds again in future years.
- Tony Bradford asked if it would be wise to put some SRA funds into a special reserve so that if parish councils needed to complete additional work outside of annual gully clearing, the SRA could help. Caroline Dunn said there had been applications for additional gully emptying to the SRA's Community Flood Action Fund (CFAF), but the CFAF review panel had tended not to approve

these applications, because of extra gully emptying works already being funded.

There were no further questions.

As recommended, the SRA Board approved funding for two new grant applications and two requests for additional funding, using funds no longer required for the project they were originally intended for.

ITEM 11 River Brue Modelling

David Mitchell outlined to Board members the history of this project and said that concerns and questions about flood risks in the River Brue catchment had again been raised at a meeting in April. Since then, more work had been done to improve understanding of the SRA-funded River Brue modelling outputs and to clarify how information could be used to support future evidence-based decision-making about flood risk management options. Mr Mitchell said hydraulic modelling formed an important component of flood risk management planning as it helped to improve understanding of how water behaves within the Brue catchment under a range of conditions. He added, however, that modelling was only one element of a broader assessment process and should be considered by technical specialists and a range of organisations alongside local knowledge, operational experience and other available evidence.

Points raised:

- Iain Sturdy said there were two IDB meetings coming up, and he was sure that the SRA Board would support the IDB leading work on a short development study to identify pinch-point locations on the lower Brue that it would be feasible to address. Mr Mitchell thanked Mr Sturdy.
- Tony Bradford said this work had been 10 years in the making and people wanted to see action. There needed to be a timeline for works.

The Chair said this item would not be on the agenda at future SRA Board meetings but he highlighted the need to monitor works going forward.

Mr Mitchell said it could be added as an agenda item at the Board's request.

The Chair welcomed the progress made since the previous SRA Board meeting in March, and expressed his appreciation of work done by officers and partners.

As recommended, the SRA Board noted the latest position on the River Brue Modelling Project.

The Board also noted that April was the final meeting of the Steering Group and actions are now being led by individual organisations.

ITEM 12 Any Other Business (AOB)

None.

SRA Chair Cllr Mike Stanton thanked participants for their contributions throughout the meeting, and their constructive and collaborative tone.

The meeting ended at 13:04pm.

APPENDIX A

On behalf of West Monkton Parish Council,

West Monkton Parish Council would like to take this opportunity to thank the Board for the previously agreed financial contribution of £150,000 towards the Bathpool Pumping Improvement Project.

The Parish Council notes that a further £100,000 contribution is being considered under Item 10 '2026-27 SRA Unallocated Enhanced Programme Funds' at this Board meeting. The Parish Council supports this additional contribution to enable expedited completion of the project to reduce the risk of properties in Bathpool being flooded like they were in January 2026.

The Parish Council requests, to share with residents in Bathpool, details of the full scope of the project, whether this has changed or been updated following the flooding in January, and the anticipated timescales for completion of the project.

Unfortunately, I am unable to attend the meeting to ask the question but Paul Elliston, copied in, has kindly offered to read the question out at the meeting.

Environment Agency Response

3 June 2026

The Environment Agency's scope of proposed works at Bathpool aims to deliver an overall improved level of protection to the community from frequent, lower magnitude fluvial flooding.

During certain situations, flood flows from the Old River Tone catchment in Bathpool are unable to freely discharge into the River Tone. This happens when the River Tone rises above known flood levels, causing the Old River Tone outfall flap valves to close completely, causing out of bank flooding upstream in the residential areas of Bathpool.

The Storm Chandra floods in January 2026 have provided additional flood event information that we are currently reviewing, and any new evidence will be incorporated, where appropriate, into the project delivery scope.

The additional grant funding from the SRA will help contribute in part towards the ongoing project design and development work but is mainly intended for construction activities. Importantly, the SRA grant will help us to secure resources and maintain our intended project scope, allow for consideration of any additional items identified by the design, and potentially provide a contingency against inflation and any other delivery risks not yet discovered e.g. the need for planning permission.

We are currently speaking to delivery partners and developing a short format business case to go through assurance steps in the next 12 months. Subject to approvals, we hope to award a delivery contract(s) as soon as reasonably possible thereafter.

NOTE:

Depending on costs and any new electricity power supply constraints, we intend to only select a pump option(s) with a larger flow capacity than the existing single diesel-powered unit that has been deployed at Bathpool since 2017.

In summary at this date, we intend specifying two new emergency pumps rather than one as existing, raised earth works (bundling) to protect the Old Tone outfall from River Tone over-topping, and a new access track to enable safer passage for maintenance vehicles in the future.

Our project scope will be continually reviewed within the context of project affordability and viability constraints yet to be fully defined in detail, but we will seek to utilise all of the available monies to maximise flood risk reduction benefits for the community.