

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Executive - 3 December 2014

The Somerset Levels and Moors Levels Flood 20 Year Action Plan – Proposed Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA)

Report of the Director – Growth and Development

(This matter is the responsibility of the Leader of the Council, Councillor Williams.)

1. Executive Summary

The report sets out progress to date towards establishing a Somerset Rivers Authority, and seeks endorsement of proposals for the SRA for further development. The report sets out the purpose of the proposed SRA, its scope and role, arrangements for its funding and governance, and a proposed way forward.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Levels and Moors Flood Action Plan sets out a number of workstreams to achieve a vision for the area, where “the impact of extreme weather events is being reduced.” Amongst the risk reduction actions in the Plan is a proposal to create a Somerset Rivers Board. The Plan makes it clear that: “a renewed, co-ordinated and joined-up approach to addressing flooding and resilience issues is required, with opportunities to develop new approaches to the management of the drained areas and the wider catchment, and for enhanced local leadership.” “We must establish long-term governance. This will include new approaches for long term funding of management work on the levels.”
- 2.2 A Leaders Implementation Group has been established to take forward the Action Plan. The Plan includes a proposal to determine the most appropriate model, and to set up a Somerset Rivers Board, which has greater responsibility for maintaining and improving water and flood risk management, including a new catchment wide funding mechanism. A Project Key Partners Group has been established to advise on developing the project, with representation from the Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs), the County and District Councils, the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department for Communities and Local Government, Natural England, the Environment Agency (EA) and the Wessex Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (WRFCC).
- 2.3 While the proposals which follow have been endorsed by the partners through the Leaders Implementation Group, they remain “work in progress” in responding to the Government request to set up a Somerset Rivers Board.

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with a report on progress to date and secure endorsement for the way forward.

2.4 Background Papers

- The Somerset Levels and Moors Flood Action Plan – Executive Summary, March 2014.
<http://somersetnewsroom.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/flood-action-plan-final.pdf>
- The Somerset Levels and Moors Flood Action Plan - A 20 year plan for a sustainable future – Full Plan March 2014.
<http://somersetnewsroom.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/20yearactionplanfull3.pdf>
- Further background information about the SRA proposal can be found in a 'Questions and Answers' document – please see **Appendix C**

3. Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) project

3.1 The current proposals have adopted the title “Somerset Rivers Authority” (SRA). With local communities wanting a higher level of funding and protection than is available from the Environment Agency’s work programme, it will be the SRA’s task to determine, by bringing together the Flood Risk Management Authorities (FRMAs) and representatives of the affected communities, what further work should be done, and to raise the relevant funding from local communities and other sources.

3.2 Purpose

It is proposed that, with its strategic overview, the SRA would be the advocate of what is needed for Somerset in reducing flood risk. Through its influence and decisions, the SRA would be accountable for the Flood Action Plan, for a co-ordinated approach to delivery, and on a Somerset-wide basis, for the funding it raises, and for how it is spent.

As currently proposed, the SRA would empower the FRMAs (the Environment Agency, the IDBs, the Lead Local Flood Authority (Somerset County Council) and the Somerset District Councils) to take on a broader role, to ensure that Somerset’s flood risk management activity benefits from the collective wisdom, experience and knowledge of all its members.

The SRA would not diminish the responsibilities of the individual partners, nor those of riparian owners. The existing FRMAs and their existing associated funding streams, responsibilities and accountabilities would continue. However, opportunities would be taken to join up delivery where agreed. The underlying principle would be one of joint working, which recognises existing organisational accountabilities.

3.3 Scope and Role

As proposed, the SRA would commission the delivery of a costed, co-ordinated Business Plan for enhanced maintenance of river channels,

important ordinary watercourses and river flood banks across the whole of Somerset. This would include dredging, and maintenance of dredged profiles. The SRA would also oversee an associated Common Works Programme.

It is also envisaged that the SRA could commission capital works and land management programmes which reduce flood risk, and could provide “partnership funding” to allow more schemes to enter the EA’s work programme.

The SRA would also in due course take over driving forward the implementation of the Flood Action Plan from the Leaders’ Implementation Group. The scope of the SRA would include strategic planning, land management and building local resilience as key activities, and with community engagement around these responsibilities.

The SRA would not include within its scope, activities associated with emergency response and recovery, or with coastal flood risk.

3.4 Funding

The proposal is to set up the SRA as a separate precepting body (like the Fire and Rescue Authority), which would raise funds from all households across the whole of Somerset, and from agricultural landowners in Somerset outside the existing IDB areas. Steps would be taken to achieve a more equitable distribution across Somerset of the charges levied for flood risk management and drainage purposes. The potential of funding contributions from business rates is also under consideration, and would be through retaining an increased proportion of the current levy rather than any additional contribution from businesses.

The IDBs would continue to set budgets for their work programmes as at present, but the special levy would, in future, be placed on the SRA. Existing sources of capital funding for flood risk management would need to continue to be available to the individual partner organisations.

There will need to be greater clarity on the way flood risk management funding is made available throughout Somerset, to balance addressing local flood risk concerns with more strategic priorities, and, in the longer term, to avoid an excessive focus on the Levels and Moors.

3.5 Interim funding

The timescales involved with establishing a new precepting body indicate that new funding raised through this mechanism would not be available for the coming financial year of 2015/16. Accordingly, interim funding of £2.7m is being sought from Central Government. Members will recall the statement made by the Prime Minister at the time of the floods in February: “We cannot let this situation happen again”. This further funding will enable the continuation of the flood risk management work which has been initiated in 2014/15, with the additional funding that has already been made available. A

copy of the letter sent by the leaders of the County and District Councils to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on this matter is attached as **Appendix B**. Given the timescales involved, and the constraints under which councils operate in raising funding through council tax, it would not be possible for this additional funding to be raised in 2015/16 by the District Councils as billing authorities through council tax bills.

3.6 SRA Governance

The current proposal is that the SRA would be a new and separate body. Each of the local partners (see para 2.2) would be represented on the SRA Board. There would need to be a technical group sitting beneath the Board, which would be drawn from the existing Somerset Flood Risk Advisory Group and Flood Action Plan Programme Board. To be cost effective, an authority would need to act as host for the SRA functions. The costs of the host authority would be covered by the funding raised by the SRA. However, the SRA would utilise the staff resources of its constituent bodies rather than employing its own staff. Scrutiny arrangements would need to be determined.

3.7 Relationships with Other Organisations

There is a recognised need to establish clearly understood relationships between the proposed SRA and other organisations involved in flood risk management. However, the existing Somerset Water Management Partnership would be seen as a key stakeholder group providing a forum for wider stakeholder consultation for the SRA. It is proposed that there will be widespread consultation with stakeholders and the wider community in developing the proposal further.

3.8 The Way Forward

While much progress has been made, there remains much to do to develop the proposal further, and secure its implementation. There will be a need for continuing lobbying. At this stage, each of the partners for the project are currently seeking to secure endorsement as outlined in this report. Agreement will be needed with central government on the processes to be used in establishing a new precepting body. The lead-in time for doing so, means that the Somerset Rivers Authority as proposed could not be fully functional prior to April 2016. However, subject to securing the necessary endorsements and funding, and wider consultation, a Shadow Rivers Authority (SSRA) could be operational from April 2015.

This would undertake the detailed planning, and put in place the necessary arrangements for the new authority. A further more detailed report will be brought to Members early in 2015, following work by the Leaders Implementation Group on the creation of a SSRA. That report will set out the proposed terms of reference, objectives and membership of the SSRA together with:-

- The timetable for completion of a detailed business case for the proposed creation of the Somerset Rivers Authority from 2016; and
- Details of what approvals are required from the Government, partners and local councils to create the Somerset Rivers Authority.

3.9 Options considered and reasons for rejecting them

The interventions believed to be necessary to create a long-term sustainable future for Somerset in the event of severe flood events were reviewed widely in the preparation of the Flood Action Plan. In selecting mechanisms for implementing the Flood Action Plan, the proposal to establish the Somerset Rivers Authority as a precepting body has the advantage of raising additional funding locally in a transparent way, and one which would not be constrained by the restrictions which apply to the existing local authorities.

Alternative proposals to progress a catchment-wide funding mechanism through the extension of the boundaries of the IDBs have been considered. However, with IDB levies on District Councils needing to be funded through the councils' own budgetary processes, this option would neither be deliverable, due to the constraints on councils, nor transparent.

3.10 Consultation undertaken

The report has been brought forward from the SCC Leaders Implementation Group which oversees the Flood Action Plan. Also represented on that group with the County Council are the Somerset District Councils and Drainage Boards, the Environment Agency, Government Departments, and other relevant organisations. County council representation on that group includes Councillors John Osman and David Hall, with Taunton Deane Borough Council represented by Cllr John Williams.

The Flood Action Plan draws on a wide range of evidence and feedback from the community. It also builds other relevant strategies and plans including Water Level Management Plans, and the Somerset Flood Risk Management Strategy

Comments from Corporate Scrutiny Committee

Corporate Scrutiny Committee met on 20 November 2014 to consider the proposals. The Committee resolved to endorse the recommendations in this report, with a number of issues raised during discussion, as follows:

- A need for co-ordination with Environment Agency's work
- Concerns over a new tax raising body and the importance of tangible outcomes.
- A view was expressed by some members that this is a national issue that needs addressing at that level, balanced by a view that local government in Somerset needed to be proactive in developing solutions.

- A need for greater clarity on the proposed funding mechanisms and how these might apply in different areas.

4. Finance Comments

At this stage there are no direct financial implications as a result of this decision. Progress in the current financial year will be funded from resources allocated through the Flood Action Plan. Any future financial implications arising from the report will be the subject of a subsequent report and decision.

If a new Precepting Body is established there will be significant implications for Council Tax payers and these will need careful consideration by the respective districts

5. Legal Comments

At this stage there are no direct legal implications as a result of this decision. However, there will be significant legal consequences associated with establishing a separate precepting body, and these will be addressed in any subsequent reports brought forward for decision.

The creation of a new precepting body will require specific approval from the Government as the County Council has no legal powers to do so.

6. Links to Corporate Aims

The Flood Action Plan links closely with the vision set out within the Somerset County Council's County Plan. In particular the objectives which seek to create a thriving local economy, improving key infrastructure and creating better links by joining up with partners, to ensure that services are more effectively delivered to Somerset's residents.

This also links to TDBC's Corporate Business Plan, specifically:

Aim 1) Quality sustainable Growth & Development:

- Objective 1) Facilitate a significant increase in the number, quality and range of available houses within the Borough, including the highest achievable proportion of affordable housing
- Objective 2) Deliver the infrastructure necessary to bring forward development opportunities (which includes identifying and implementing a flood solution)

Additionally, the '*Growth Prospectus for Taunton*' includes within the 'Place and Infrastructure' category, the key project: Delivering a long term strategic flood solution for Taunton, offering additional protection to existing development and enabling future growth.

7. Environmental and Community Safety Implications

The aim of the project is to improve community safety and well-being, by providing a long term sustainable funding solution to flood risk management.

8. Equalities Impact

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been drafted by SCC – please refer to **Appendix A**.

9. Risk Management

If new collaborative arrangements for the funding, co-ordination and delivery of flood risk management in Somerset are not developed and agreed, there is a significant risk that the intensity and duration of flooding events will continue to adversely affect local communities and businesses, and the County and District Councils in the delivery of services. The County Council's budgetary planning would be likely to be adversely affected, along with its reputation.

Key risks also apply to the timescales associated with making the changes required. Unless momentum is able to be maintained in the delivery of this project, there are risks that the new funding arrangements proposed will not be in place for financial year 2016/17.

10. Partnership Implications

The report has been brought forward from the Somerset County Council Leaders Implementation Group which oversees the Flood Action Plan. A Project Key Partners Group has been established to advise on developing the project, with representation from the Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs), the County and District Councils, the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department for Communities and Local Government, Natural England, the Environment Agency (EA) and the Wessex Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (WRFCC). Each of the local partners would be represented on the SRA Board.

11. Recommendations

That the Executive Committee agrees:

- 11.1. That progress to date in the development of the Somerset Rivers Authority proposition is endorsed, together with the way forward as set out in the report, and that a further report follows in due course;
- 11.2. To endorse the ongoing work by the Leader of the Council and the Flood Action Plan Leaders Implementation Group to progress the creation of the shadow Somerset Rivers Authority, as proposed in this report, subject to confirmation by the Government of the proposed interim funding.

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Appendix A

Impact Assessment Form and Action Table 2014 - 2016 (Expand the boxes as appropriate, please see guidance www.somerset.gov.uk/impactassessment to assist with completion)			
"I shall try to explain what "due regard" means and how the courts interpret it. The courts have made it clear that having due regard is more than having a cursory glance at a document before arriving at a preconceived conclusion. Due regard requires public authorities, in formulating a policy, to give equality considerations the weight which is proportionate in the circumstances , given the potential impact of the policy on equality. It is not a question of box-ticking; it requires the equality impact to be considered rigorously and with an open mind. "			
Baroness Thornton, March 2010			
Why are you completing the Impact Assessment?			
Proposed New Policy or Service	<u>Change to Policy or Service</u>	MTFP or Paper	Service Review or SCC Change Programme
What are you completing the Impact Assessment on (which policy, service, MTFP reference, cluster etc)?		Proposal to establish a Somerset Rivers Authority	
Section 1 – Description of what is being impact assessed			
The Recommendation: That the Cabinet endorses progress to date in the development of the Somerset Rivers Authority proposition, and the way forward as set out in the report, with a further report to follow in due course.			
Section 2A – People or communities that are targeted or could be affected (for Equalities - taking particular note of the Protected Characteristic listed in action table)			
Whole of Somerset			
Section 2B – People who are delivering the policy or service			
Staff of Existing Flood Risk Management Authorities			
Section 3 – Evidence and data used for the assessment (Attach documents where appropriate)			
Flood Action Plan			
Section 4 – Conclusions drawn about the impact of the proposed change or new service/policy (Please use prompt sheet in the guidance for help with what to consider):			
Community Safety – the aim is to improve community safety			

Equality Issues that will need considering as the proposal is developed further are likely to include:

- The standing of the proposed SRA, and any agreements which underpin it, in relation to the Equality Act 2010;
- Adding clarity to the ways in which the SRA will be representative of the community;
- Further consideration of the ways in which the SRA will reflect the various characteristics and interests of the communities in Somerset, in terms of equality and diversity;
- Developing mechanisms to ensure that information from and regarding the SRA will be openly accessible.

Health and Safety – none identified at this time

Health and Wellbeing – the aim is to improve community well-being

Privacy – none identified at this time

Sustainability – the aim is to provide a long term sustainable funding solution to flood risk management

Risk

Please consider and record the potential risks to the Council following completion of the Impact Assessment. Use the RAG matrix to consider the possible areas of risk, for example, financial, reputation, social. Score the accumulative risk and record here.

Likelihood	2	Impact	2	Risk Score	4
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Section 5 – After consideration please state your final recommendations based on the findings from the impact assessment. Also include any examples of good practice and positive steps taken.

No issues identified at this time.

Section 6 - How will the assessment, consultation and outcomes be published and communicated? E.g. reflected in final strategy, published. What steps are in place to review the Impact Assessment

The impact assessment will be reviewed as the project progresses.

Completed by: Martin Buckle

Date 31.10.14

Signed off by: Sarah Diacono

Date 31.10.14

Compliance sign off Date

To be reviewed by: (officer name)	Paula Hewitt		
Review date:	31.10.14		
Version	0-6	Date	31.10.14

**John Osman**

Leader of Somerset County Council

Somerset County Council

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14 October 2014

The Right Hon Elizabeth Truss
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Nobel House
Smith Square
London
SW1P 3JR

Sent on behalf of all Somerset Local Authorities

Dear Elizabeth

Future funding of the Somerset Rivers Authority

We write further to :

1. Our meeting on Friday 10 October 2014
2. A meeting I convened of the District Council Leaders on 13 October 2014

In our meeting on 10 October 2014, you advised us that the £2.7 million of interim funding that we had requested from DEFRA to initially fund the Somerset Rivers Authority would not be available.

Having spoken with the District Council Leaders, we are of the strong view that if the full £2.7 million one year, gap funding cannot be found by DEFRA (or any other Government department), then there can be no Somerset Rivers Authority.

This interim funding of £2.7 million is essentially to continue the vital flood prevention work through 2015/16, whilst the mechanism for permanent long term funding is agreed.

In relation to permanent funding, it is essential that primary legislation is passed to allow the creation of a Somerset Rivers Authority as a separate precepting authority and based on the understanding of your predecessor, this is the approach we have all been working towards over the past 9 months.

Owing to constraints on raising Council tax, funding of the Somerset Rivers Authority cannot be achieved by raising Council taxes without exceeding the referendum thresholds.

If we were to proceed with a referendum, then we believe it would have to be held in May 2015.

A separate, accountable and transparent Somerset Rivers Authority is the only way in which future flooding in Somerset can be tackled and alleviated. If the Somerset Rivers Authority does not have any powers or budget, then it cannot succeed.

You will recall in the middle of the Somerset flooding crisis, the Prime Minister kindly visited and stated that money would be no object, we cannot allow the flooding to happen again, and that no interdepartmental disputes in Whitehall would be allowed to interfere. Unless we receive interim funding and thereafter an ability to create a separate precepting authority, then all of the good work which we have achieved over the last nine months will count for very little.

The County and District Councils have been constructive and are exploring all options for future funding and we have not sought to lay all future funding requirements at Central Government's door.

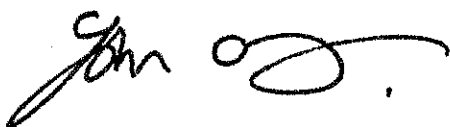
We would ask you to support us in honouring the Prime Minister's commitment by agreeing the interim funding requested and initiating primary legislation to create the Somerset Rivers Authority as a separate precepting authority.

For information we enclose a breakdown of the 2015/16 interim funding requirements which incidentally has gone up to £3 million, but we are prepared to accept £2.7 million.

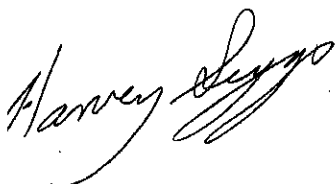
You will note this letter has been signed by Local Authorities' Leaders in Somerset as this shows the collective strength of feeling.

We look forward to receiving a more positive response.

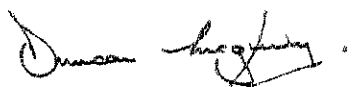
Yours sincerely



Cllr John Osman
Leader of Somerset County Council



Cllr Harvey Siggs
Leader of Mendip District Council



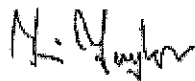
Cllr D McGinty
Leader of Sedgemoor District Council

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rick Pallister', with a horizontal line underneath.

Cllr Rick Pallister
Leader of South Somerset District Council

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Williams', written in a cursive style.

Cllr John Williams
Leader of Taunton Deane District Council

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim Taylor', written in a cursive style.

Cllr Tim Taylor
Leader of West Somerset District Council

CC David Cameron
Eric Pickles
District Council Leaders

Enc – Breakdown of 2015/16 interim funding requirements

Somerset Levels & Moors Flood Action Plan

The logo features the text 'Somerset Levels & Moors' in a smaller blue font above 'Flood Action Plan' in a larger, bold blue font. Below the text are three curved, overlapping lines in shades of blue, resembling a stylized wave or a landscape feature.

Questions and Answers - The Somerset Rivers Authority 31.10.2014

Somerset County Council's Cabinet are being asked to agree and recommend to Full Council, a proposal for a Somerset Rivers Authority, that has been put forward by a special working group as part of the Flood Action Plan.

This includes being asked to endorse progress so far, and recommends creation of a Shadow Authority - subject to Government agreement to provide £2.7m interim funding, as well as supporting legislation to allow it to become a precepting authority (like the Fire and Rescue Service – see details under Funding).

The proposal follows intensive work that considered various options, and has been endorsed by the partners involved in the Flood Action Plan's Leaders Implementation Group. It is still a 'work in progress' before final proposals are formally consulted on, and can be firmed up and implemented.

The following Questions and Answers explain the proposal:

What is the Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA)?

Flood risk management funding from central government to the Environment Agency provides a certain level of flood protection, but with local communities wanting a higher level of funding and protection, the SRA would determine what further work needs to be done and raise funds from local communities and other sources to deliver that work. In addition it would:

- Provide a strategic overview and be *the* advocate of what is needed for Somerset in reducing flood risk
- Be accountable for the current Flood Action Plan, for a co-ordinated and joined up approach to the delivery of flood risk management across the whole of Somerset; for the funding it raises, and for how it is spent
- Empower the Flood Risk Management Authorities (the Environment Agency, the Internal Drainage Boards, the Lead Local Flood Authority - Somerset County Council - and the Somerset District Councils) to take on a broader role, ensuring Somerset's flood risk management activity benefits from the collective wisdom, experience and knowledge of all its members.

It would not diminish the roles, funding and responsibilities of the individual partners (nor those of landowners), but would enable joint working opportunities.

Why do we need it (and what is currently in place)?

The main provider of flood risk management activities is the Environment Agency, whose funds and investment decisions are based on national assessment and cost benefit analysis. After the flood event of 2013/14 the Somerset Levels and Moors Flood Action Plan was developed to achieve a long term vision for the area in which the frequency, duration, depth, extent and impact of flooding had been reduced.

The creation of a SRA is among the risk reduction actions in the Plan, to deliver greater local control and responsibility for maintaining and improving water and flood risk management on the Levels and Moors.

In addition to the Environment Agency's responsibilities and duties, drainage on the Levels and Moors is managed by the Internal Drainage Boards and county and district councils also have flood risk management responsibilities both on the Levels and Moors and in the wider county.

What will it do?

As part of its scope and role the Somerset Rivers Authority would:

- Commission a costed, co-ordinated Business Plan for enhanced maintenance of river channels, important ordinary watercourses and river flood banks across the whole of Somerset. This would include dredging, and maintenance of dredged profiles. It would also oversee an associated Common Works Programme.
- Commission capital works and land management programmes which reduce flood risk, and could provide "partnership funding" to allow more schemes to enter the Environment Agency's work programme.
- Take over implementation of the Flood Action Plan.

Its scope would include strategic planning, land management and building local resilience as key activities, with community engagement around these responsibilities.

It would not include emergency response and recovery, or coastal flood risk activities.

Who will maintain the parts of the rivers that were dredged this year?

It is planned that the future monitoring and maintenance of the Rivers Parrett and Tone 8km dredge will be completed locally by a new Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) and funded locally outside of central government funds. However that funding will not be in place in the next financial year, which is why Somerset's local authority leaders have written to the Secretary of State asking for essential interim funding. In the meantime the Environment Agency and Land and Water Services are working with Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium to share lessons learnt from this project and share knowledge on the best monitoring and maintenance options to help the future SRA

Who has drawn up the proposal for the SRA?

With the endorsement of the partners involved in the Flood Action Plan's Leaders Implementation Group, a (SRA) Project Key Partners Group has been established to advise on developing the project. It includes representatives from the Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs), the County and District Councils, the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department for Communities and Local Government, Natural England, the Environment Agency (EA) and the Wessex Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (WRFCC).

Governance - Who will be responsible for it?

The current proposal is that the SRA would be a new and separate body, with each of the local partners (mentioned above) represented on its Board. It would need to be a precepting body (see section below) and this would require supporting government legislation, which has been requested.

There would need to be a technical group beneath the Board, drawn from the existing Somerset Flood Risk Advisory Group and Flood Action Plan Programme Board.

To be cost effective, a member authority would need to act as host for the SRA, with costs covered by SRA funds, and the SRA would use the staff resources of its members rather than employ its own staff. Scrutiny arrangements would need to be determined.

Funding - Who will pay for it?

Funding is already levied from agricultural landowners on the Levels and Moors, as well as indirectly from all Somerset households. The SRA proposal is for a separate precepting body (like the Fire and Rescue Authority), which would raise additional funds from all households across the whole of Somerset and from agricultural landowners in Somerset outside the existing Internal Drainage Board areas. The funding for the SRA would be clearly identified in council tax bills.

Funding contributions from business rates are also being considered.

The proposal states that there will need to be greater clarity on the way flood risk management funding is made available throughout Somerset, to balance addressing local flood risk concerns with more strategic priorities, and in the longer term, to avoid an excessive focus on the Levels and Moors. Although the flood event of 2013/14 directly affected homes and businesses on the Levels and Moors, flood risks exist throughout the county and affect all aspects from business to tourism to travel.

Until the SRA is operational, interim funding of £2.7m for the coming financial year of 2015/16 is being sought from the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, to continue work begun under the Flood Action Plan.

The Internal Drainage Boards would continue to set budgets for their work programmes as at present, but the special levy would in future be dealt with by the SRA. Existing sources of capital funding for flood risk management (in the main,

central government funding through the Environment Agency) would need to continue to be available to individual partner organisations.

What levy would householders and agricultural landowners be expected to pay?

The annual funding required is still being calculated. However, the £2.7m funding sought for 2015/16 would be the equivalent of a 1% increase on council tax bills (i.e. the total bill, including County, District, Parish and Police and Fire and Rescue charges).

How will the required funding be spread across householders and landowners throughout Somerset?

There are a number of different options for this and we are still reviewing these

When will the SRA start and what are the next steps?

While much progress has been made, there remains much to do to develop the proposal for the SRA further, and secure its implementation. At this stage, each of the partners for the project will seek endorsement for progress so far and 'in principle' support for the creation of a Shadow Authority.

Agreement will be needed with central government on the processes to be used in establishing a new precepting body, and for interim funding. Subject to this, as well as securing the necessary endorsements and wider consultation that would need to take place, a Shadow Rivers Authority could be operational from April 2015.

This would then undertake the detailed planning, and put in place the necessary arrangements for the new SRA to be operational from April 2016.

Has the government agreed to interim funding / legislation to become a precepting authority?

Earlier this year, the previous Secretary of State, Owen Paterson, was supportive of finding the £2.7m funding. As a result this month, John Osman, Chairman of the Flood Action Plan Leaders Implementation Group, and Leader of Somerset County Council, together with all Somerset's Local Authorities' Leaders, wrote to Elizabeth Truss, Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs requesting interim funding and the necessary legislation. The Secretary of State's response was received on October 28. It said:

"I understand that the source and mechanism for the sustainable long term funding of the Authority will take some time to finalise and that you have not yet been able to identify funding for next year. I have asked my officials to work with you and the Environment Agency to discuss the outcomes we want to achieve and the projects that would be required.

The SRA must be in place, in some form, in order to receive any future funding and take forward this work. In the short term I encourage you to press on with appointing a chairman and board."

In view of the above, what will the next steps be?

The Flood Action Plan Leaders Implementation Group is due to meet on November 6th and will be discussing the next steps at that meeting.