

North West Regional Flood and Coastal Committee Minutes of the meeting held on Friday, 19 January 2024

Attendees

Members and invited presenters

Adrian Lythgo (Chairman)
Councillor Giles Archibald (Cumbria Strategic Flood Risk Partnership)
Councillor Stephen Clarke (Lancashire Strategic Flood Risk Partnership)
Councillor Jane Hugo (Lancashire Strategic Flood Risk Partnership)
Councillor Tony Brennan (Merseyside Strategic Flood Risk Partnership)
Anthony Morley (Merseyside Strategic Flood Risk Partnership)
Councillor Richard Silvester (Greater Manchester Strategic Flood Risk Partnership)
Councillor Philip Cusack (Greater Manchester Strategic Flood Risk Partnership)
Councillor Nick Mannion (Cheshire Mid Mersey Strategic Flood Risk Partnership)
David Shaw (EA Appointed Member – Planning and Design)
Carolyn Otley (EA Appointed Member – Communities)
Susannah Bleakley (EA Appointed Member – Coastal)
Kate Morley (EA Appointed Member – Conservation)
Neville Elstone, (EA Appointed Member – General Business and Assurance)
Perry Hobbs, (EA Appointed Member – Water Industry)
Carl Green, Chair of the North Wales and North West Coastal Group
Fran Comyn, Rochdale Borough Council
Paul O'Hare, Manchester Metropolitan University
Peter Maynard, Rochdale Borough Council
Dee Grahamslaw, United Utilities
Katie Eckford, Shoreline Management Plan Co-ordinator / Coastal Group Secretariat

Environment Agency Officers Present

Ian Crewe, Area Director, Greater Manchester Merseyside and Cheshire (GMMC)
Nick Pearson, Area Flood Risk Manager (GMMC)
Mia Hanson, Area Flood Risk Manager, Cumbria and Lancashire (C&L)
Sally Whiting, Senior FCRM Adviser (GMMC)
Adam Walsh, FCRM Programming Manager (C&L)
Crystal Orton, RFCC Project Manager (GMMC)
Rachel Harmer, RFCC Secretariat (GMMC)
Andy Tester, FCRM Programming Manager (GMMC)
Gary Hilton, Senior FCRM Adviser (GMMC)

Local Authority Officers:

Nick Rae, Westmorland and Furness Council
Alison Harker, Cumbria Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Lorah Cheyne, Lancashire Strategic Flood Risk Partnership

Sarah Wardle, Merseyside Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
David Boyer, Warrington Borough Council
Matt Winnard, Cheshire Mid Mersey Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Sarah Parkinson, Rochdale Borough Council

Visitors:

Sharma Jencitis, United Utilities (UU)
Fiona Fairley, UU
Tracey Garrett, National Flood Forum (NFF)
Charlotte Danvers, EA National FCRM Manager
Geraint Laidlaw-Wilson, Binnies Environmental Consultancy

24 (01) Welcome, Chairman's Introduction & Apologies for Absence

Adrian Lythgo opened the meeting and gave everyone a warm welcome. Adrian received agreement from Members for the meeting to be recorded, for minute writing purposes only.

Members were advised apologies had been received from Councillor Tricia Ayrton, who had wanted to welcome the Committee to Rochdale in person, but in light of the recent passing of Tony Lloyd MP, who was a close friend, she had submitted her apologies. Adrian Lythgo reflected that Tony Lloyd enjoyed huge respect both locally and nationally, and he invited Councillor Cusack to say a few words. Councillor Cusack advised he had known Tony for many years, who has been a great friend of Salford Council and was a personal friend of the former Mayor of Salford, Ian Stewart. Tony was born in Greater Manchester and was important to Greater Manchester, starting as a Councillor in Trafford, then MP for Stretford, the Police and Crime Commissioner for Greater Manchester, then interim Mayor for Greater Manchester, before becoming the MP for Rochdale. Members heard he was always interested in people and had time for everyone. He was a caring politician and always determined to represent everyone in his constituencies and was a true man of the people. Adrian thanked Councillor Cusack for his words.

Adrian advised apologies for the meeting had been received from Councillor Daniel Barrington and Councillor Ian Moncur, both from the Merseyside Strategic Flood Risk Partnership; Paul Barnes (EA RFCC Appointed Member – Agriculture); Chris Findley (EA Appointed Member – Development and Sustainable Investment); Councillor Tricia Ayrton (Greater Manchester Strategic Flood Risk Partnership); Councillor Karen Shore (Cheshire Mid Mersey Strategic Flood Risk Partnership); Stewart Davies (EA Board Member); Fiona Duke (EA Area Flood Risk Manager for Lancashire), Carol Holt (EA Area Director for C&L) and Laura Bigley, Lancashire County Council.

Members received and approved two correctly nominated substitutions for Members:

- Anthony Morley in place of Councillor Daniel Barrington

- Councillor Jane Hugo in place of Councillor James Shorrocks

Adrian advised the recent National RFCC Recruitment round has now finished. Carolyn Otley was welcomed back, who will continue her second term on Committee as EA appointed member for Communities. Two new appointments were welcomed – Kate Morley, the new RFCC EA Appointed Member for Conservation, and Susannah Bleakley, the new RFCC EA Appointed Member for the Coast.

Ian Crewe, lead EA Area Director for the NW RFCC, was welcomed to the meeting, along with guest speakers for the day: Fran Comyn, Paul O'Hare, Dan Bond, Dee Grahamslaw and Katie Eckford.

A warm welcome was given to Sharma Jencitis, Fiona Fairley, Tracey Garrett, Charlotte Danvers and Geraint Laidlaw-Wilson, all here as meeting observers.

Adrian referred Members to his quarterly Chair's Update paper, shared with Members on 15 December, and highlighted the update had covered two storms and since then we have had Storm Henk. He reflected that while there has been a lot in the news about the extent of flooding in this, the wettest winter on record, there has not been a strong connection to climate change made in the media and national debate. Adrian recognised this is something that will be being discussed in the sub regional partnerships. Adrian noted the recent weather has not affected the North West as much as other parts of the country this winter.

No Declarations of Interest have been received.

24 (02) Minutes of the RFCC Meeting held on 20 October 2023 and actions and matters arising

The Committee were asked if they have any comments on the minutes of the last meeting and there were none. Councillor Giles Archibald proposed and Councillor Richard Silvester seconded the minutes of the October 2023 RFCC meeting. The minutes of the 20 October 2023 RFCC meeting were approved by the Committee.

On matters arising:

1, Members received confirmation that there is interest earned on Local Levy balances which are added at the start of the year. Further information is being sought on this and will be reported back to Members.

2, Biodiversity Net Gain - Carl Green wished to correct an erroneous reference to the Cumbria Innovation Flood Resilience project working specifically on peat beds – the reference was intended to be to the Wyre NFM project.

3, Surface Water Management - Members were advised that more details on this will be provided in due course and in terms of the specific question asked by Councillor Giles Archibald this information will be brought together.

24 (03) Recent Flooding Incidents

Adrian Lythgo referred Members to the report provided on flooding in the last quarter. He remarked on the limited amount of flooding experienced in the North West compared with other parts of the country, down to a combination of luck with weather impacts, interventions overseen by the Committee, and operation of RMA assets. However there has been some internal property flooding, mostly occurring in Cheshire West and Chester this quarter, along with considerable infrastructure affected in Merseyside and other places.

He provided Members with the opportunity to comment on any flooding in their areas, or nationally. There were no further comments.

24 (04) Flood Poverty – Project Findings and Recommendations (RFCC Business Plan Action ID8)

Adrian Lythgo welcomed Fran Comyn and Paul O'Hare to the meeting, here to provide Members with the summary findings from this project, funded from Local Levy through the RFCC's Business Plan, and to help to translate these into new approaches and shared learning for all.

Paul advised that his role in the project is primarily around monitoring, evaluation and dissemination of findings. In his presentation Paul covered:

- An outline of the broad approach to the project
- Desk-based review and the large amount of emerging research around the link between disadvantage, other aspects of disadvantage and flood hazard
- How flood hazard maps across our communities
- Social vulnerability map - heat maps to show where flood hazards intersect with other dimensions of vulnerability, so in this case for people living in lower social economic conditions.
- Two questionnaires resulting in 103 responses. Paul gave thanks to Sarah Parkington and to the National Flood Forum (NFF) for their help with this work.
- Two workshops, four focus groups, and 28 qualitative interviews
- How the Flood Poverty project has started to build the links to explore through the Resilient Roch project being funded through the national FCRIP (Flood Coastal Resilience and Innovation Programme) programme.
- Links to thinking in universities to make sure that we have the right approach to resilience and adaptation.

Paul shared the principles that had been identified for and by the project:

- Recognising risk and disadvantage

- 'Just' adaptation
- Avoid unintended consequences
- Adaptation that links to broader social, economic, environmental and public policy agendas
- Collaboration and networking
- Doing *with* – not *to* – communities
- Targeted engagement
- Embed lessons learned in future practice/ innovations

In relation to the project's findings, Paul particularly wanted to highlight:

- The importance of maintenance of our assets
- The need to work with other sectors to ensure that we are getting the right sort of insurance into communities - people have different perceptions of insurance, it is not always seen as a priority and there are now very few local insurance brokers.
- Housing and property management:
 - The strong association between flooding and deprivation both for tenanted and homeowners
 - Lack of investment by private landlords in properties in flood risk areas bought cheaply to generate rental income
 - Letting agents, managing agents and landlords not always clear on their responsibilities.
- Lack of flood and climate literacy amongst both professional stakeholders and communities.

The Committee received an overview of how the findings and recommendations are set out in the report and noted the summary of key recommendations:

1. Integration across sectors at a local level and operational delivery offers the best way of dealing with residual risk.
2. Professional stakeholder and residential and business communities are required.
3. Use existing networks from many sectors to deliver flood resilience.
4. People need to be able to access insurance that is appropriate.
5. In the private rented sector, letting and management agents and landlord roles and responsibilities need to be 'clarified', tightened, publicised and training provided, and tenants and lessees need to know their obligations.
6. Property Flood Resilience (PFR) – New maintenance models are needed for householders and Responsible Providers as in disadvantaged communities we cannot assume that maintenance will occur without LA support and intervention, whole building or street approaches are vital, Flood Performance Certificates need to cover all residential properties, and again a cross-sector integrated approach is needed.

Fran Comyn then provided Members with an overview of the Resilient Roch Project, which is one of 25 projects in the national FCRIP, which has £6.5 Million of programme investment to March 2027. Within the Resilience Roch project, the communities of Littleborough and Wardleworth are being used to pilot a whole range of measures to inform how we support and deliver community flood resilience beyond 2027.

There are a number of stakeholders working together to deliver this project including; EA, NFF, UU, OVO Energy, Groundwork Energyworks, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, NW RFCC, Flood Re and ABI (Association of British Insurers), Defra, DLUP

(Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) and local landowners, businesses and community bodies. Members noted the key drivers for the project along with a new focus on integrated water management, engagement with the energy sector, and flood and fuel poverty.

With regard to community capacity and leadership Fran highlighted the need for street champions to gather and share knowledge within the community.

Work packages are also looking at whole house climate resilience in terms of sustainable maintenance and affordable maintenance.

Adrian thanked Fran and Paul for their presentation and asked if there were any questions or comments.

Carolyn Otley welcomed this presentation and remarked on the range of new approaches being considered together for building community resilience, all of which reflects what has happened in Cumbria after Storm Desmond. She highlighted the local government re-organisation in Cumbria where there are now two Unitary Authorities, which have two new housing teams located in the same department as the flood teams, which feels like an opportunity. She asked what advice the presenters would give to the new organisations.

Peter Maynard (Rochdale Borough Council Housing) recommended engaging with elected RFCC Members and finance teams with the details of the project to get their support and buy-in, as Local Authorities need to invest alongside other funding they can attract. He reflected on the challenge of deteriorating condition of housing (often terraced) within deprived communities due to the lack of ability of residents to invest. He emphasised the importance with terraced properties of making improvements to the whole terrace. Traditionally central Government has stepped in with grant regimes, every ten to fifteen years, where Local Authorities can tackle problems in these areas. He also highlighted that Local Authorities can still borrow money at reasonable rates and there is a strong case for investing in housing stock in deprived areas, which has positive knock-on effects on other elements of public spending.

Members were advised of a £1 Million of investment in the last 12 months from the public health budget to make properties wind and watertight to prevent hospital admissions. The Committee heard that overall savings from doing this have been immense. There has also been recent investment to re-point 80 properties in the Wardleworth area for a cost of £0.5 Million, which will secure the housing stock into the future. Peter reinforced the need to look at whole system costs and savings.

Peter reflected on the tragic death of a small child in Rochdale due to damp and mould in their home, and highlighted that this is having huge national implications and important changes are about to be made. The Decent Home Standard for social rented

accommodation has not had the effect it was meant to have from the amount of social rented stock that now needs significant retrofitting and deep repair. This Decent Home Standard is about to be applied to private rented homes as well but the Government has been encouraged to not stop there, but to look at the issues around owner occupiers too, as increasingly there are owner occupiers that also suffer from those challenges.

Ian Crewe thanked Fran and Paul for their presentation and highlighted the importance of supporting our most vulnerable and commended them for their work. Ian noted that Rochdale is one of the most diverse communities in the country, many residents may not speak English and he asked if the project group were well enough equipped to penetrate these communities.

Councillor Giles Archibald shared his support for this work. He noted the high level of child poverty in Rochdale, which is also equalled by some wards in Cumbria and he advised the new authorities in Cumbria are heightening their attention to the issue of financial resilience, which is one of their major priorities. He remarked that the unitarisation of Westmorland and Furness and Cumberland Councils will help to increase focus on these issues and confirmed that flood zones are talked about, not only from the EA's perspective, but also based on Cumbria's projections.

Councillor Archibald also remarked on the need to integrate initiatives like this with other things going on in the area. He asked about Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and what will be reported to the Committee to measure the success of the project. Fran advised there is a monitoring and evaluation framework which has been established for the Flood Poverty Project and expanded for the Resilient Roch Project. In time with further mainstreaming, this will start to get things more embedded in the Council's wider indicators. Fran advised the monitoring programme can be shared to provide further information.

ACTION: Fran Comyn

Regarding wider integration, Fran advised this is ongoing with internal and external linkages in place. With regard to community diversity and engagement, Fran advised that Rochdale Council has a long-standing relationship with its communities and also have a long-standing relationship and important partnership with the National Flood Forum (NFF), who have developed trust and awareness with communities.

Peter Maynard reflected that during the Covid pandemic his team were front and centre in getting food and fuel vouchers out to people and liaising with utilities etc. Eighty sustainable community groups were operating across Rochdale, some based on specific ethnicities and others were geographically based. Trusted partners within these eighty community groups are still in place where strong links are constantly maintained.

Councillor Nick Mannion advised in the 1990s he worked with North Staffordshire communities suffering mining subsistence, who had very similar issues to those experienced in Rochdale. They had no access to insurance due to recorded mining

faults and mine shafts and also the National Coal Board had sold off a lot of their properties to private landlords. In his experience one of the most effective insurance brokers was the Credit Union, which was run by the local community. He suggested a future KPI focussing on awareness of other sectors e.g. Fire and Rescue, Health Service.

Ollie Hope asked whether the project team is in touch with the EA's Green Finance Team on insurance. Fran advised this is part of Paul Cobbings' work programme, but any further assistance that can be given would be most welcome.

Adrian Lythgo advised that most Local Authorities have an approach to try to engage with parts of communities which have multiple issues around social injustice. Rightly they are all different as they relate to different communities. He highlighted the challenge of holding on to key resources to continue such engagement if it is not mainstreamed. Adrian asked is there a shared learning event that can be run off the back of this project to help Local Authorities with their own internal work. Fran agreed that this can be provided.

Nick Pearson added a final remark reminding Members of the major flooding which had occurred in Rochdale in Storm Eva in December 2015 when 324 homes flooded and 18000 properties were without power. There is now a Rochdale and Littleborough flood scheme delivering significant investment to reduce the flood risk.

24 (05) Greater Manchester Integrated Water Management Plan

Dee Grahamslaw, United Utilities, provided the Committee with a presentation on the learning gained from the development of an Integrated Water Management Plan (IWMP) in Greater Manchester. This extraction and dissemination of learning has been funded by the RFCC through its Business Plan. This was further dissemination of knowledge on the back of the interim update to the October RFCC meeting while the project was still underway.

After introducing the aims of the IWMP developed by the partnership, Dee reported that learning from the project has been distilled, facilitated by Jacobs consultants, through interviews with key UU, EA, and GMCA Directors, and structured workshops with the project team.

Dee provided an overview of the key ingredients to developing an IWMP and detail of how to integrate with other partners, share objectives and establish trust with each other. Keeping project momentum was also identified as a key ingredient, with focussed themes for weekly meetings, along with co-locating to a central location to learn more about each-others organisations. Detail was also shared about creating visibility for the project, its work and its outcomes with the commitment to share best practice nationally, in a simplified and accessible way.

Councillor Giles Archibald commented that Manchester gets a lot of its water from Cumbria, yet Cumbria's contribution is very rarely mentioned. He also spoke about the need for water to be purified through peat and if peat in Cumbria is severely degraded, the water is of poorer quality. Adrian Lythgo advised this can be picked up as part of the agenda later in the meeting.

Adrian Lythgo thanked Dee for her presentation recognising that the approach is scalable and therefore the dissemination of the learning from GM is very valuable.

24 (06) Report from the RFCC Finance & Business Assurance Sub-group

For the benefit of new Members, Adrian Lythgo advised that this item is the formal decision-making process for items included in the reports to and from the RFCC Finance and Business Assurance Sub-group, which take place in advance of full RFCC meetings to discuss and scrutinise proposals in greater detail.

Neville Elstone thanked the Sub-group, he welcomed their scrutiny, debate and discussion and welcomed others to attend future meetings. He was pleased to have had discussion on maintaining assets. Adam Walsh presented the update on the investment programme.

Update on the Capital and Resource Maintenance Programme 2023/24

Properties better protected

- 2,857 properties across the North West have already been better protected this year. This is 80% of the target and comes from 11 projects.
- Latest forecasts indicate a total of 3,462 North West properties will be better protected by year end.
- Key schemes contributing are the Wyre Beach Management Scheme, the Radcliffe and Redvales FRMS and the West Kirby Flood Alleviation Scheme.
- This is a reduced forecast from the 4,379 properties reported at the last Sub-group meeting. This is due to delays to scheme delivery meaning that the benefitting properties will now be better protected in future years. The Penketh and Whittle FRMS is one example but there are others.

Expenditure – Year end forecasts

- Total capital funding for the 2023/24 programme is £107.456 Million.
- We are forecasting to spend £107.22 Million this year, £0.234 Million less than allocated.
- This is due to several projects being deferred, including the Hambleton Scheme, the Cumbria and Lancashire Culvert Programme, and both Areas' Screen programmes. These were all impacted by the transition to new delivery frameworks, previously identified as a risk.

Expenditure – Actual to date

- At the end of November actual spend was 43% of the full year forecast.

- EA schemes have spent 48% of their forecast – with £42.88 Million left to spend.
- LA schemes have claimed 22.6% of their forecast with £18.25 Million still to claim in 2023/24.
- Significant spend is still required between now and the end of the financial year and Adam urged LAs to submit any grant claims as soon as possible.

Reporting efficiency savings

- Nationally we are significantly under the 10% efficiencies reporting target, which is a condition of the FCERM GiA funding.
- There has been a new efficiency reporting approach this year which aims to increase submissions, acceptances, and response times by using Area resources to assure the quality of efficiency claims before they are reported to National. Members noted training has been supplied to both EA and RMAs, with technical support available locally and within National teams.
- North West accepted efficiency claims this year total £4.77 Million across 10 projects.
- Total North West efficiencies for the 6-year programme to date of £6.2 Million. This is positive, but there is still a way to go to achieve the target.
- West Kirby provided as an example of efficiency savings - relating to the procurement of pre-cast concrete contract, which provided 19 weeks programme time saving and resulted in £1.5 Million of financial savings.

EA Resource (Resource and Maintenance) Funding

- 2023/24 funding currently totals £21.056 Million (including staff costs, maintenance, and resource project information).
- Currently both areas are showing a forecast above budget.
- An additional £25 Million has been allocated in-year across the country, specifically for maintenance delivery, which does not yet appear in budgets. The North West allocation is £1.36 Million (£0.8 Million for GMMC and £0.56 Million for C&L).
- There is also approximately £1 Million of capital salaries to be recharged from resource to capital budgets, and in C&L there is an accounting error with the Glasson Dock Scheme, which will result in £0.6 Million being moved from resource to capital.
- These changes will result in a forecast reduction of approximately £3 Million to the reported figures.

Members were advised Paul Bowden, EA FCRM Operations Local Delivery Lead for GMMC Area, had attended the Sub-group meeting to provide Members with an overview of what maintenance work has been funded and delivered over the last quarter. Adam advised the NW Operational Delivery Teams have also been providing incident response support to other areas during the last quarter and highlighted that during incidents regions come together to provide a national team effort.

Adam Walsh then provided a summary of the risks to the overall investment programme, which include: optimistic forecasts; inflation; weather conditions; incidents, and resources (all RMAs). We heard industrial action has now been removed as a risk for this year.

The Committee heard the availability of resource funding is going to be a challenge over the next few years, which is likely to see reduced programmes of work being delivered and this has been highlighted in the recent NAO report and a number of reports from the media. Adam also referred to conversations at previous meetings about risks affecting flood schemes and he advised this is being worked on for a future meeting.

Neville Elstone thanked the EA teams involved in the maintenance work, in responding to the increase in maintenance budget.

Indicative FCRM Grant-in-Aid Allocation for 2024/25

Adam Walsh reminded Members the indicative capital allocation in October 2023 was £93.38 Million against a bid of £108.7 Million. Following the RFCC's Local Choices submission our request for additional GiA has been largely accommodated with a final allocation of £98.56 Million, which is good news.

National are asking RFCCs to view their final allocations as the minimum amount of funding required, and an over-programme of 20% has been built into the programme in order to support achieving the minimum spend. Adam emphasised we should not slow down on delivery and should look to accelerate delivery or discuss new delivery opportunities.

The number of properties benefitting from reduced flood risk in 2024/25 attached to the £98.56 Million funding allocation is 1,710. A list of the projects contributing to this figure is provided. The increase to the 2024/25 allocation (of £5.18 Million) mainly relates to three projects: Blackpool Beach Nourishment; Rivermede Embankment, and Little Bispham.

Adam also highlighted that through the Local Choices process, the £327k funding for the River Calder at Billington Scheme has been pushed back in the current programme and there is an indicative figure in the programme for future years. There is still the opportunity to bring this back into the immediate programme if it is deliverable.

With regard to the supporting and enabling programmes, Adam advised we will look to bolster certain elements of this programme, particularly the reconditioning, through our over-programme.

Adam advised that the final settlement on the GiA asset maintenance allocation for 2024/25 should hopefully be available for the April 2024 meeting.

Neville Elstone highlighted there was a lot of information to take in and advised Members are welcome to contact Officers offline to discuss any concerns.

As is formally required at all January RFCC meetings, the Committee were asked to consent the allocation of FCRM Grant-in-Aid for the 2024/25 programme. The RFCC provided their consent.

Local Levy Programme 2023/24

Adam provided a summary of the Local Levy programme including the opening balance, this year's income, the allocation and spend forecast, and therefore the expected closing balance.

Following the question raised by Councillor Archibald at the previous meeting, Adam advised that further information on interest earned on Local Levy balances will be provided at a future meeting.

In terms of the Local Levy resource, there is expected to be a gradual reduction in the Local Levy balance to somewhere between £3 - £3.5 Million by the end of 2024/25, and then remaining at that level.

Adam Walsh reiterated the intention to provide confidence ratings on Levy funded projects and their spend going forwards, to be developed over the next quarter.

Members were then asked to consider a Local Levy contribution to the River Irwell at Kearsley scheme. Neville Elstone advised that a good robust discussion took place at the Sub-group meeting. He advised the request is for circa 10% of the funding for this scheme and acknowledged that Local Levy funding is the funding of last resort, where it can be used to step in and underwrite the project.

Councillor Stephen Clarke raised his concern about a total scheme cost of approximately £20 Million for 80 properties, advising that other schemes have been knocked back even with better cost-benefit ratios and he questioned as to why the Billington Scheme had been rejected, which has had flooding over a number of years.

Nick Pearson advised the cost benefit information can be shared and Councillor Giles Archibald asked for this information to be shared with all Members.

ACTION: Nick Pearson/Adam Walsh

Neville remarked that all challenges to funding requests are welcome. Members heard and noted that the request for Local Levy funding for the Kearsley Scheme was supported by the majority at the RFCC Finance and Business Assurance Sub-group Meeting and the recommendation was to support the funding request.

Adrian Lythgo remarked that the concern raised by Councillor Clarke about value for money is an important point, as well as being raised by the NAO in relation to the whole programme. He advised that Committee is challenged with balancing value for money with protecting communities from flooding. He reflected that some of our best value for money comes from coastal defence schemes where large numbers of people are protected but where communities haven't experienced widespread flooding in the north west for some considerable time whereas some communities inland have been flooded

more than once. He advised that seeking to balance these considerations is an important part of our role.

Councillor Richard Silvester asked if the Committee can look and see if we can support moving the Billington Scheme forwards. Adrian advised this project is still in the programme, but as with a number of schemes the full funding package is still being established. The Local Levy can be used to underwrite projects and fill the funding gap in order to get them moving forwards.

Adam Walsh highlighted the Frequently Flooded Allowance that can be used for when a community of ten or more properties have flooded twice within the last ten years. Up to a maximum of £2.5 Million per project can be awarded and he advised recent conversations have taken place with National colleagues to ensure that our North West communities who have experienced this are on the list to potentially receive this grant. Adam also advised in the meantime conversations will continue with other EA colleagues seeking to secure as much GiA and Other Government Department (OGD) funding as we can for our projects.

Following consideration 11 RFCC Members approved the additional Local Levy contribution of up to £2.4 Million for the River Irwell at Kearsley FRMS.

Capital Programme Co-ordinator Role

Neville Elstone emphasised the importance of this Local Levy funded role in sharing learning and translating information between the EA and other RMAs. He advised following the discussion at the RFCC Finance and Business Assurance Sub-group Meeting he was pleased that a majority decision was clarified and recommended to the RFCC, which included a number of conditions which were presented to Members.

Members confirmed their support of the recommendation from the RFCC F&BASG to extend funding of the post until the end of March 2027.

Local Levy Strategy Refresh

Sally Whiting reminded Members of the Local Levy Strategy, first produced in 2020, which sets a framework for the RFCC's use of the funding and guides the allocation of Local Levy. Members heard the document is now subject to a light-touch refresh rather than a substantial review.

She reported that a couple of key matters of principle had been raised and discussed by the Finance and Business Assurance Sub-group. The first was on the setting of a presumed maximum Local Levy contribution to a single scheme. Of the two options proposed to the Sub-group, there was a consensus for setting this at £5 Million, fixed for the duration of the Local Levy Strategy (likely to be 2 or 3 years).

RFCC Members noted the majority of Sub-group Members supported this recommendation, however Councillor Stephen Clarke asked it to be noted that the Lancashire Strategic Flood Risk Partnership supported option B for the presumed maximum Levy contribution (set at the level of the annual income), which they believe provides greater flexibility. Following a vote 10 Members supported the RFCC Finance and Business Assurance Sub-group's Option A recommendation, with 2 opposing.

The second principle relates to reviews of Local Levy funded staff resources and new guideline requiring the sponsorship and involvement of an independent RFCC member and an appropriate senior EA manager with a degree of separation from the role(s).

Members supported both the principles for inclusion in the revised Local Levy Strategy.

Sally Whiting advised the draft revised Local Levy Strategy is included in the papers for the meeting and welcomed any further feedback by the end of January. Neville thanked Members for their discussion.

Resolved:

Following the recommendations from the RFCC Finance and Business Assurance Sub-group, the Committee:

- Noted the progress delivering the 2023/24 capital and resource programmes
- Consented the FCERM GiA final capital allocation for 2024/25.
- Consented the FCERM GiA asset maintenance resource indicative allocations for 2024/25 pending final approval
- Noted the current Local Levy position and current spend forecast.
- Approved the additional Local Levy contribution of up to £2.4 Million for the River Irwell at Kearsley FRMS, noting this is in addition to the £600k of Local Levy approved for the Scheme in January 2021.
- To support the continuation of the Local Levy Capital Programme Co-ordinator (CPC) role until March 2027, subject to implementation of the conditions agreed.
- Supported Option A (£5 Million) as the presumed maximum Local Levy contribution to FCRM Schemes.
- Supported the introduction of new principles relating to reviews of Local Levy funded staff resources.
- Noted the further opportunity to comment on the draft Local Levy Strategy by the end of January 2024.

24 (07) RFCC Business Plan and Local Levy Programme 2024/25

For new RFCC Members Sally Whiting provided an overview of the RFCC Business Plan highlighting that we are about to go into the third and final year of the plan, after which a refresh will be done. She provided a summary of status and performance on the 25 projects, 22 of which are currently live. Members heard that the vast majority of projects are progressing to plan and of the £1.4 Million investment this year, the current

forecast is around £1.1 Million. Sally provided brief highlights of a few of the Business Plan projects.

The Committee heard that Project RAINCOAT (ID2.2) is no longer progressing due to the changes in personnel and loss of resource.

With regard to RFCC Business Plan investment for 2024/25, Members were advised the funds required for this is £1.187 Million. A breakdown against the ambitions was provided along with a breakdown of how the benefits of the investment is spread across the partnerships.

Councillor Giles Archibald welcomed seeing peatland restoration in the plan but was unable to see where the resources have been allocated to achieve this and asked if the investment matches the ambition. Sally confirmed that this work would come under the Managing Water at a Catchment Scale with Nature ambition and that she would welcome seeing this work scoped to see what peatland restoration is taking place across the North West before proceeding. Adrian Lythgo advised that a gap analysis is the only tangible action, which will determine the level of investment required, although it's not in the programme right now.

Kate Morley advised she is happy to see this in the plan and looks forward to supporting its consideration within the Business Plan.

Resolved: The RFCC:

- Noted the progress on Business Plan projects and spend forecasts
- Acknowledged the close-down of action ID2.2 (Project RAINCOAT)
- Approved the proposed 2024/25 funding allocation of £1.187 Million to Business Plan projects.

For the whole Local Levy programme for 2024/25, Adam Walsh presented the table of proposed Local Levy allocations and provided a short overview for Members.

Adrian Lythgo remarked on the variability of Local Levy allocations on schemes and within partnerships from year to year as it very much depends on which big schemes are coming through and how much Local Levy they need in each year. He recommended Members to observe Local Levy allocations over three or four year periods, so they can stand back from it and see the longer term patterns.

Adrian Lythgo then asked Members to indicate their approval for the proposed Local Levy allocations for 2024/25.

Resolved: The RFCC:

- Approved the proposed Local Levy allocations for 2024/25, as recommended by the Finance and Business Assurance Sub-group.

24 (08) Recent national developments relevant to flooding policy and programme implementation – Recent NAO reports and NIA recommendations

Adrian Lythgo welcomed Dan Bond, who presented an overview of the findings and recommendations from the recent National Audit Office (NAO) report and the National Infrastructure Assessment (NIA).

Members heard the NIA is the second assessment, published in October 2023, which has not moved on a great deal since the first NIA, but key elements of the report include the setting of long-term measurable targets and ensuring funded plans are in place to significantly reduce the number of properties that are at risk of flooding by 2055. Dan highlighted the focus on surface water. There is currently national consideration being given to setting clear targets in terms of surface water flood risk, local plans and devolved budgets.

The Committee were advised that from a rivers point of view there are similar messages with regard to having long-term measurable targets, NAFRA2 (National Flood Risk Assessment) is also referenced and the need to have different resilience standards in different places has also been recognised.

With regard to the NAO report, published on 15 November 2023, Members heard there is lots of cross over with the NIA themes and Dan advised the IPA review (Infrastructure and Projects Authority) is also similar.

The NAO study highlighted the following recommendations:

- The current programme needs reprofiling to ensure value for money.
- There needs to be budget flexibility between capital and maintenance.
- Planning for the next capital programme needs to take place.
- Need to develop long-term milestones to 2100.
- Need to improve business case forecasts.
- Need to improve the completeness, consistency and accuracy of data.

Dan advised the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) met on 27 November to discuss the findings, where Philip Duffy, EA Chief Executive and Caroline Douglass, EA Executive Director for Flood and Coastal Risk Management, attended. The PAC raised significant concerns including in relation to the re-profiling of the capital programme, asset maintenance, development in the flood plain, and surface water and data.

Adrian thanked Dan for his attendance and advised the Committee could pick up the themes from the review at the RFCC Finance and Business Assurance Sub-group,

particularly with regard to value for money and deliverability as there are a number of attendees who will be able to feed into this conversation and provide advice.

24 (09) SMP Explorer Launch

Katie Eckford provided Members with an overview of the Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) Explorer tool, being launched nationally at the end of January 2024, which is a new map-based tool to make SMPs easier to access and understand. Whilst aimed at coastal practitioners, the SMP Explorer tool is also available to the public and will help them to better understand the risks of coastal flooding and erosion, alongside the management approaches and actions being taken along the coast. Katie also provided a summary of SMPs including their planning timeframes, coastal management policies and North West implementation progress.

Katie outlined the importance of the coast for communities, wildlife, economy and tourism and there are many factors and stakeholders that have an interest or play a key role in the coast who have varying needs and priorities. With climate change comes rising sea levels and more intense storms.

Councillor Giles Archibald commented on the forecast figures shown in the presentation, advising that the lower level probability scenario shown will be much more damaging. Carl Green advised the figures are based on the medium forecasts. The affordability of the measures required and what we do about this is the focus of the innovation project.

Members heard that from summer 2024, the Explorer website will link to the Coastal Erosion Risk Mapping data for England and include climate change impacts information. There will also be a link to the National Assessment for Flood Risk later in the year.

Adrian Lythgo thanked Katie for her presentation advising of this good resource and good platform to widen the conversation with communities. Susannah Bleakley advised this resource is a big step forward and we should all be using the SMPs more.

24 (10) Any Other Business

Carolyn Otley made Members aware of a Met Office online course on climate change which is now available to Community Emergency Planning Groups across the UK, which shows the likely impacts of flooding across the UK.

Councillor Giles Archibald commented that flooding and phosphorous transfer are related and enquired on the role of this Committee with regard to dealing with this phosphorous overload. Adrian Lythgo advised that this is not directly within the remit of the RFCC but that he has not considered this fully and the Committee will need to have time to consider and think through this properly. Perry Hobbs advised that UU does a lot

of work with farmers and landowners with regard to soil management best practice, along with the EA. He advised where there are permits to discharge phosphates and UU works with landowners to find more cost beneficial ways to reduce phosphates on their land. Councillor Archibald raised his concern with this issue in light of the climate change predictions advising this is a deteriorating position and not an improving one. Adrian advised this is something that could be considered under the 'Managing Water at a Catchment Scale' Business Plan theme, which the Cumbria Partnership will play a part in.

Councillor Stephen Clarke highlighted that under new proposed legislation developers will no longer automatically have the right to connect to existing drainage networks unless they have an approved sustainable drainage system in place and advised these proposed changes are due to come before parliament very soon.

With regard to the consultation on the adoption of Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act and following on from the presentation given by Laura Bigley at the October 2023 RFCC meeting, Adrian advised the consultation that was due to be launched is still outstanding and his personal view is that there is some risk that it may not happen before any general election.

Adrian again welcomed the two new RFCC Members and thanked the two outgoing RFCC Members, Suzana Ilic and David Harpley. He asked Members if they were happy for him to write letters of thanks to Suzana and David on their behalf, for their excellent four years of contributions, which they were happy to support.

ACTION: Adrian Lythgo

Adrian Lythgo referred Members to the information papers, with particular reference to the UU update paper and the paper advising Members of the January 2025 meeting date.

Adrian thanked Members for their attendance to the meeting and again apologised for the cancellation of the site visit to Rochdale, which would have been very powerful to illustrate the discussion earlier in the meeting.

The next RFCC meeting will be held virtually on 26 April 2024.