

North West Regional Flood and Coastal Committee

Draft Minutes of the meeting held on Friday, 27 January 2023

Present

Adrian Lythgo (Chairman)
Councillor Stephen Clarke (Lancashire Strategic Flood Risk Partnership)
Councillor Jane Hugo (Lancashire Strategic Flood Risk Partnership)
Councillor Tricia Ayrton (Greater Manchester Strategic Flood Risk Partnership)
Councillor Alan Quinn (Greater Manchester Strategic Flood Risk Partnership)
Councillor Ray Mashiter (Greater Manchester Strategic Flood Risk Partnership)
Councillor Karen Shore (Cheshire Mid Mersey Strategic Flood Risk Partnership)
Councillor Laura Crane (Cheshire Mid Mersey Strategic Flood Risk Partnership)
Councillor Daniel Barrington (Merseyside Strategic Flood Risk Partnership)
Neville Elstone (EA Appointed Member - General Business and Assurance)
Chris Findley (EA Appointed Member – Development and Sustainable Investment)
David Shaw (EA Appointed Member – Planning and Design)
David Harpley (EA Appointed Member – Conservation/ Natural Flood Management)
Carolyn Otley (EA Appointed Member – Working with Communities)
Suzana Ilic (EA Appointed Member – Coastal)
Carl Green, Chair of the North Wales and North West Coastal Group
Stewart Davies, EA Board Member

Also in attendance

Doug Coyle, Cumbria Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Andrew Harrison, Cumbria Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Laura Bigley, Lancashire Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Clare Nolan-Barnes, Lancashire Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Lorah Cheyne, Lancashire Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Councillor James Shorrock, Blackburn Council
Imran Munshi, Lancashire Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Fran Comyn, Greater Manchester Flood Risk Partnership
David Boyer, Cheshire Mid Mersey Strategic Flood Risk Partnership (part attendance)
Matt Winnard, Cheshire Mid Mersey Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Katie Eckford, Shoreline Management Plan Co-ordinator / Coastal Group Secretariat
Anthony Morley, Merseyside Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Sarah Wardle, Merseyside Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Johnny Phillips, United Utilities (UU)
Kathryn Mashedder, UU
Mark Ellis, WSP

Environment Agency Officers Present

Keith Ashcroft, Area Director (Cumbria and Lancashire (C&L))
Stewart Mounsey, Acting Area Director (Greater Manchester Merseyside and Cheshire (GMMC))
Ben Scott, Area Flood and Coastal Risk Manager (GMMC)
Anthony Swarbrick, Area FCRM Operations Manager (C&L)
Mary-Rose Muncaster, Area FCRM Operations Manager (GMMC)
Sally Whiting, Senior FCRM Adviser (GMMC)

Adam Walsh, FCRM Programming Manager (C&L)
Tracey Hartley, FCRM Programming Manager (GMMC) – part attendance
Rachel Harmer, RFCC Secretariat Officer (GMMC)
Sarah Fontana, Senior LA Capital Projects Adviser (GMMC)
Marina Powell-Currie, FCRM Team Leader (C&L)
Matt Ellis, EA Senior Adviser – Green Growth Team
Karen Hopkinson, EA FCRM Senior Adviser (GMMC)
Dale Gibbons, EA FCRM Senior Adviser (C&L)
Nikki Beale, EA FCRM Senior Specialist (C&L)
Paul Bowden, EA FCRM Senior Adviser (GMMC)

Observers:

Chloe Boyle, Marine Management Organisation (MMO)
Angela Jones, Cumbria County Council
Councillor Giles Archibald, Westmorland and Furness Council
Rowland Kirkman, Lytham Flood Action Group
Graham Harrison, Member of the public

23 (01) Welcome and Chairman's Introduction

Adrian Lythgo opened the meeting, thanked Members for joining and welcomed attendees.

Adrian briefly referred to apologies received from Councillor Keith Little, who had to attend a funeral today. He advised today would have been Councillor Little's last meeting and said he would return this under AOB.

No declarations of interest have been received.

Members approved and supported correctly nominated substitutions for two Members, who have sent apologies for today's meeting; Anthony Morley on behalf of Councillor Tony Brennan, and Andrew Harrison on behalf of Councillor Keith Little.

Adrian welcomed observers which included; Chloe Boyle of the Marine Management Organisation (MMO), Rowland Kirkman from Lytham Flood Action Group, Angela Jones from Cumbria County Council, and Councillor Giles Archibald, representing Westmorland and Furness Council. Adrian advised he will discuss the new RFCC arrangements for Cumbria shortly.

Adrian highlighted his quarterly report, circulated on 19th December, which included flood scheme visits, either in progress or complete, in West Kirby, Kendal and Egremont. He had also attended a number of fruitful face-to-face meetings and thanked colleagues for the organisation of those.

He brought Members' attention to a couple of recent Government announcements including the consultation expected soon on the implementation of Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, which specifically recommends that Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFAs) become the approval body for sustainable drainage (SuDS) in new developments. Adrian advised he will come back to this under Any Other Business (AOB),

where we can discuss how we might respond as a RFCC. He also advised that Defra have just announced more detail on the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS), the replacement for the CAP payments to farmers, which he is currently making himself familiar with. He advised he had not identified any immediate headlines around flood prevention, but there do appear to be individual payments and measures that could contribute to flood prevention, which is something the Committee will be interested in looking at.

Adrian remarked on the recent period of wet weather, triggering a large number of flood warnings and flood alerts in the North West, but understood the amount of internal flooding to properties has been relatively limited. He did explicitly recognise that flooding is always significant for the people who are involved.

Adrian referred to Information Item C which outlines the response to the Defra consultation on the representation for Cumbria on this Committee. Adrian advised Members would have seen that the two new authorities come into being in April, Westmorland and Furness, and Cumberland. He advised whilst both expressed a preference to have a seat on the RFCC, the response has highlighted a preference for a rotational membership of the one Member place for Cumbria on the Committee. Should this be the outcome of the consultation Adrian advised he has a meeting with representatives of both Councils during February, but as it's the Committee's convention for sub regional areas to define the way in which they're represented for their number of places, and given rotational membership arrangements already in place (Merseyside), Adrian advised he cannot see that there will be any issues for the Committee. He confirmed he will report back after that meeting.

Katherine Massheder from United Utilities (UU) was thanked for the very helpful update paper that was circulated to Members last week. Adrian advised he had found the update very helpful and recommended it to Members.

Adrian advised we have a particular focus on the approach to maintenance and management of flood assets in today's meeting, which is clearly very important as part of our suite of flood defence mechanisms. He highlighted this is just as important as investment in new flood defences given that we will be considering consenting both the revenue and capital allocations for 2023/24 at today's meeting.

23 (02) Apologies for Absence

Adrian Lythgo noted apologies for absence from Members: Councillor Keith Little (Cumbria Strategic Flood Risk Partnership); Councillor Elizabeth Grey, Councillor Ian Moncur and Councillor Tony Brennan (Merseyside Strategic Flood Risk Partnership); Paul Barnes (EA Appointed Member – Agriculture), Perry Hobbs (EA Appointed Member – Water Industry); Jill Holden (Greater Manchester Flood Risk Partnership); Ollie Hope, EA Area Flood and Coastal Risk Manager (GMMC), Pete Miles, EA Area Flood and Coastal Risk Manager (C&L) and Sharon Kennedy, EA Acting Area Flood and Coastal Risk Manager (C&L).

23 (03) Minutes of the RFCC Meeting held on 21 October 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2022 were proposed by Councillor Ray Mashiter and seconded by Councillor Alan Quinn.

There were no further comments.

23 (04) Matters arising and actions from the last meeting

There were no matters arising or actions from the last meeting.

23 (05) Flood Incidents Update

Adrian Lythgo advised the Lancashire Strategic Partnership has provided information on flooding which took place in Fylde/ Freckleton on 7 September and also in Blackburn with Darwen on 8 September.

With regard to the flooding in Blackburn, Imran Munshi advised there was a large thunderstorm, which lasted for approximately 20 minutes, causing internal flooding to 20 residential properties, 13 businesses and numerous reports of highways being flooded.

Councillor Stephen Clarke also noted flooding occurred in Cleveleys.

On behalf of the Greater Manchester Strategic Partnership Councillor Alan Quinn advised on 10 January in Wigan there was internal flooding to four properties with vulnerable residents, which led to an emergency evacuation of an additional educational needs school. This flooded for a second time on 12 January, this time with no internal flooding. Following an investigation the cause of the flooding was found to be a culvert on private land, which appeared to have not been maintained and emergency clearance works were carried out by Wigan Council.

In Cumbria Andrew Harrison advised there had been flooding to one property in Portinscale due to a blocked culvert, one property flooded at Maryport due to surface water flooding, and flooding to Grange Over Sands Golf club.

On behalf of the Merseyside Strategic Flood Risk Partnership Anthony Morley advised there was nothing significant to report.

Adrian advised where we have significant internal flooding taking place, a report is usually produced and included with the meeting papers. However, due to the timing of the flooding events mentioned today and as there had been relatively little to report for this quarter, a verbal update only was arranged for this meeting.

Members were thanked for their contributions and there were no further comments.

23 (06) Update on EA FCRM Assets and Asset Maintenance

Adrian Lythgo advised this session will focus on asset management and maintenance, providing an overview and understanding, particularly of EA assets, but there will also be an opportunity to hear contributions from strategic partnerships about other asset issues.

Nikki Beale provided the Committee with an overview of the North West EA maintenance programme, how the resource budget is prioritised and used, details of extraordinary impacts on the programme, future investment and discussed opportunities for partnership working.

Members heard in the North West there are 6450 kilometres of main river and over 1000 kilometres of coastline, along with around 200,000 residential and non-residential properties at risk of flooding. The EA manage 16 reservoirs, 15 strategically important assets and over 86 major assets or operating sites. There is a flood risk asset replacement value of £8.6 billion and all this combined with protecting and looking after 177,000 hectares of environmentally designated sites.

Nikki advised in the days of the National Rivers Authority (NRA) the work involved lots of hard engineering solutions, realigning watercourses and the construction of pumping stations, but as years have progressed and the NRA became the EA, there are different priorities and different remits to reduce the likelihood of flooding as well as to protect the environment. Members heard the EA has been left with a legacy of assets and land drainage agreements that still need to be maintained and operated along with new flood schemes.

Paul Bowden provided an overview of funding which hasn't changed much over the last few years, irrespective of what has been bid for. He advised funding is allocated to individual assets rather than area e.g. Local Authority (LA) area.

Paul then covered:

- The need to make risk-based choices to maximise the benefit from the resources available.
- The large EA capital investment programme creating additional assets to be maintained and operated.
- Staff resourcing being a challenge. Recruitment campaigns for Field Team vacancies are ongoing. Over the last 12 months there has been a churn of approximately 26% in team members. Salary is one of the reasons the EA are struggling to recruit staff, as more attractive salaries and reward packages are offered by the private sector.
- Supplier, contractor, material and energy costs are all increasing with inflation running at over 10%. Energy use increasing significantly for pumping during wet weather.
- Unscheduled works which need to be built into the maintenance programme for any adhoc mechanical and electrical work.
- An overview of the annual Local Choices process, enabling Area teams to adjust the allocated programme.
- The breakdown of North West spend by activity. The EA spends over £1 Million a year on pumping stations and electrical costs.

Paul provided detail on the work of the EA Field Teams including:

- Vegetation management on assets to ensure their resilience and effective operation.
- Work carried out on main rivers including an example of partnership working between the EA and Stockport Council to remove a large boulder on the River Medlock that had started to restrict the channel from flowing.
- The management of natural build-up of gravel in some rivers and the EA's predetermined levels which trigger this, helping to optimize what is a very expensive activity.
- Conveyance work - removing vegetation/obstructions on the sides of a channel and in the bed of a watercourse, to maintain flow – and the environmental constraints in place for this type of work (protected species, times of year etc).
- EA incident response activity including the operation of flood basins, clearing debris screens to prevent blockages.
- Support to the Police and other bodies, including supporting the Environment Management Teams and Waste Crime Teams as well as helping to remove illegally dumped waste from watercourses.
- Educational activities, working with schools and communities on what the EA does, deterring fly tipping and encouraging care of local watercourses.
- Training and exercising with partner organizations (e.g. Army, UU).
- Enforcement, usually where people have encroached into a river channel, either built illegal structures or unconsented structures.
- Confined space work carried out by the specially trained breathing apparatus team, who carry out inspections underground.

Members were then interested to hear that for every tree removed during maintenance work, five are replanted.

Nikki Beale then provided an overview of health and safety and that there have been a number of incidents in recent years, including one fatality in another area of the EA. Health and safety is the top priority and consequently internal processes have been reviewed. She also referred to the EA's application of Construction Design Management (CDM) regulations for those who operate ride-on plant. Various recommendations in relation to risk assessments have been implemented and new ways of working are being piloted.

The Operations Delivery Team are aiming to become industry leaders in health and safety, already achieving the Health and Safety Award for Field Services and are working closely with suppliers and contractors to share and learn from best practice.

Paul Bowden then covered:

- The impacts of UNISON strike action and work to rule days on the delivery of the maintenance programme, requiring more work to be contracted out at greater expense.
- The links between delivery of maintenance and the Asset Management Strategy
- The work of the asset inspectors who visit assets to ensure they are healthy and not below the required condition.
- Smaller fixes to assets that can be managed within the in-year budgets compared with more significant fixes which need to go through the capital programme as schemes.

- Asset management plans being developed and work underway to see how the EA and LA's could work together better.
- The CCTV culvert inspection program (around £750,000 annually in the North West). The EA has been sharing their programme so that LA's don't need to duplicate this work. Close working is also taking place with Network Rail.

Finally, Nikki Beale provided an overview of Stannah Pumping Station, on the Wyre Estuary in Lancashire, currently owned by Wyre Council but in the process of being handed over to the EA. It is a fantastic piece of engineering, although old and in need of refurbishment. The Committee were advised that any new station will require all partners to be involved, given that there are numerous sources of flood risk and were advised the EA are looking for partnership involvement to work together to see what a future station might look like.

Adrian Lythgo thanked Nikki and Paul for their presentation. He advised that we look at sources of flood risk, but as a Committee we also need to understand how we're using our assets to create net (rather than gross) risk and how the EA and also the LAs have to balance resource decisions in order to bring that about.

Councillor Alan Quinn thanked Nikki and Paul for a very interesting presentation. He noted the significant spending on hard engineering and highlighted an item in The Guardian about how the Dutch are now restoring their rivers to the way they were 300 years ago. He advised our rivers were engineered to go straight for the industrial revolution, but the way they were naturally when they meander helps to hold the water and stop areas from flooding.

He recognised the challenges of keeping hold of resources, which is also a big issue in Local Government, losing staff to the private sector for better pay and conditions, and then having to use the private sector to secure the necessary skills.

Councillor Alan Quinn raised the issue of invasive species including Giant Hogweed and asked what EA teams do with this. Paul Bowden advised the EA spray and remove invasives if they are on a flood defence asset and the asset needs to be inspected, but the EA do not blanket-spray areas in order to remove the invasive species. However, there is a current pilot study on management of invasives on Timperley Brook as invasives could affect the operation of some of the flood basins.

Stewart Davies introduced himself to the Committee and thanked Nikki for providing a clear emphasis on the health and safety priority. He reflected the very clear importance this has taken within the EA following the fatality two years ago of an operative undertaking asset maintenance work. He advised that a very clear set of lessons learned are now being implemented.

With regard to future maintenance and climate change, Anthony Morley asked how the EA are going to plan for increasing inspections, increasing works and increased costs. Paul Bowden advised this will be covered in the next presentation, but advised the EA are developing asset management strategies to put in place a more strategic and efficient long-term process for whole-life asset management planning.

David Harpley highlighted we need to take into account the carbon budgets of draining peats. He also suggested that the species composition of grassland can be changed to make the overall growth of the grass shorter (reducing need for cutting), as well as improving their biodiversity. Adrian thanked David for his suggestion.

Carl Green asked if there was potential for the EA to work with LAs to undertake maintenance work and particularly to build local resource and whether we can involve the communities and volunteer buy in? Nikki Beale recollected this has been done previously in Wyre but is something that would need to be considered further. She advised the EA have framework contractors, but if there was a willingness from the LA, it's something that could be explored.

Adrian Lythgo noted discussions have been taking place on skills needed across the different members of the Strategic Partnerships, about whether there is anything that can be done to connect with local labour to address the skills gap.

Carl Green enquired about joint funding with regard to Stannah Pumping Station and asked what the process of funding would be from budgets that aren't currently in place. He also asked in terms of assets which are maintained by the LA and UU whether there would be joint funding from the EA.

Adrian Lythgo asked that the Stannah discussion be taken outside of the meeting to see if there is something that can be done and whether this could be an example used as proof of concept and sharing of learning.

Councillor Jane Hugo advised she has recently seen a Natural England presentation on the re-wiggling of rivers in the context of climate change and biodiversity which Members may be interested in seeing and enquired as to whether there would be an appetite from members to have a meeting that focuses on sharing best practice on this.

Councillor Hugo then referred to the asset management presentation provided and enquired as to why Blackpool, as a Unitary Authority, wasn't included in the detail. This was explained to be an oversight and a revised version of the information contained within the presentation would be circulated to Councillor Hugo and other Members following the meeting.

Adrian Lythgo thanked Councillor Hugo for her comments and advised her suggestion on the climate change and biodiversity point will be picked up as part of the agenda planning for a future meeting. He advised it is something we do need to look at, not least in terms of net gain and broader strategies across partners.

Keith Ashcroft highlighted the strong relationship between the EA and Blackpool Council. He also touched upon the comments raised by Councillor Quinn and the work done to manage flood risk in Holland. He advised Dutch flood risk management professionals visited Cumbria following Storm Desmond and were astonished and overwhelmed with what they saw. He highlighted that Carol Holt, the new EA Area Director for Cumbria and Lancashire, works very closely and has a strong relationship with Rijkswaterstaat in Holland.

With regard to re-wiggling of rivers, Keith highlighted the River Ribble in Lancashire, which won the UK Rivers Prize for an 8 year programme, included river re-wiggling at quite a significant scale. Members also heard in December 2022 the EA won the European Rivers Prize for the Cumbria River Restoration Programme.

Members were advised of the new solar array at Alt Crossens Pumping Station, which having been ran on diesel, then electricity, is now run on solar energy and is saving one ton of carbon every two days.

Laura Bigley advised the EA is looking at reviewing its Living on the Edge guide, which is a guide to owning a water course for riparian owners. Laura commented there is information available on .gov.uk, but highlighted work is being carried out in the background to make the handbook a little more accessible to those who don't have access to the internet.

Andrew Harrison asked with regard to the CCTV programme, would it be worthwhile putting this through the Making Space for Water Groups. Nikki Beale confirmed the Operational Teams do have links into these groups and advised it is something that can be done.

Adrian thanked Members for the discussion.

There were no further questions.

23 (07) National Asset Management Strategy

Karen Hopkinson and Dale Gibbons provided the Committee with an overview of the draft National Asset Management Strategy, encouraging Members to read and feedback on its content and advising of the tight timeline for comments with the plan to be completed and published during Spring this year.

The last iteration of the Asset Management Strategy was written in 2017 when the EA were going for ISO55000 accreditation, which was achieved in 2018. The aim now is to widen out the strategy, capture all types of EA assets applying similar standards and processes, as well as to incorporate ambitions contained in other EA strategies. It will reflect changes and developments in the asset management world since 2017, EA organisational change and the need for greater efficiency.

Members were provided with the EA's strategic landscape, showing how the different strategies across the organisation fit together.

Karen advised the draft Asset Management Strategy is high level and once in place will be translated into an Implementation Plan, to be published later this year, which will detail more about the actions coming out of the Strategy. At that point we will see what this means in terms of local outcomes and how it links into other plans such as River Basin Management Plans, Shoreline Management Plans and Flood Risk Management Plans.

Members heard how the new Strategy will include an asset management vision statement, one of the requirements of ISO55000, which describes how all the activities are to be carried out.

Dale Gibbons provided the Committee with an overview of the four core ambitions of the draft strategy; Resilient assets, Sustainable decisions, Multiple benefits, and Systems approach, each with a set of principles.

One example provided was a shift from the current principle of relying on visual condition assessment of assets, largely waiting for assets to fail before they are fixed, to a whole life asset management approach which will mean the EA has a better understanding of when assets are likely to deteriorate and whether they'll need repair, replacement or refurbishment. Members noted there are a number of projects starting to be delivered this year that will come under the new ways of working.

Chris Findley commented that the strategy sounds entirely laudable and makes a lot of sense but asked what the level of confidence is in moving from a fix and fail approach to a whole life management approach, highlighting the difficulties around a nationally fixed budget.

Dale recognised this clear challenge but commented that the whole life management planning would enable the EA to have confidence and provide clear evidence on the investment needed to be able to make the case to Defra. He advised the EA are currently not in a position to provide this. The partnership funding calculator is also set up to fund new assets and not for maintaining the resilience of our existing assets.

Dale highlighted the need to be smarter about attracting green finance and alternative funding sources, linking into the work on climate change adaptation, environmental improvement and flood risk management. He advised that he is working with partnerships across organizations to maximize funding to achieve maximum outcomes.

Adrian Lythgo commented that had the point about the partnership funding calculator being set up to fund new assets and not for maintaining the resilience of existing assets not been raised then he would have raised it. He commented on the Land Drainage Futures work previously presented to the RFCC, focussed on the specific areas of Alt Crossens, Waver Wampool and the Lyth Valley. He advised that there are active conversations around water level management planning for reasons other than draining the land, although that clearly has to be part of the picture as well.

Carolyn Otley remarked on the contrast between the Strategy's clear focus on physical assets as capital assets and their experience through the Innovative Resilience work of having to view community resilience as a flood risk management asset because of its use of capital funding. She reflected this is a big distinction in terms of relationships with communities.

Carl Green remarked that the new Strategy is fantastic and long overdue and hopes that it will leverage in some additional funding. He asked if links with other non-traditional partners were intended, suggesting there could be more success with the NHS, for

example. Dale agreed with Carl's comment recognising the social and health benefits and advising there could be a number of mutual opportunities to be explored.

Carl then asked how the EA are considering bringing in the other assets which protect significant areas within the Northwest region and particularly referenced the coastal assets, as they are not included in the strategy. Dale advised in terms of coastal assets, this is an area to be worked on across organizations in terms of how we collaborate and do our asset management in a way that shares the benefits as closely as possible with local authorities. He expressed his vision of a place where we've got combined asset management across our RMA service management authorities.

Carl thanked him for this response and expressed it was really good to hear.

Adrian Lythgo thanked Karen and Dale for their presentation and advised Members the way in which the Committee as a whole responds to this consultation will be taken off line.

There were no further comments raised.

23 (08) Report from the RFCC Finance Sub Group

The following Finance Sub-Group papers from the meeting on 12 January 2023 were provided for this item:

- Minutes from the 12 January RFCC Finance Sub Group meeting
- Report to the 12 January RFCC Finance Sub Group meeting
- 2023/24 FCERM Grant in Aid (GiA) Allocation (National EA paper)

Adam Walsh stepped through the report, which provides an overview of the North West RFCC 6-year investment programme 2021 - 2027. It provides progress on delivering the in-year capital (all RMAs) and revenue (EA only) programmes.

Members heard this year the North West programme is forecasting to better protect 4,337 properties from flooding, which is a reduction from 4,693 properties, reported to the October 2022 meeting. This reduction is due to a few projects being pushed back in the programme. To date this financial year we have better protected 1,314 properties from flooding.

Adam reported on a request to change the properties better protected target to 3,957 properties instead of the programme-derived target of 8,162 properties. A final decision from the National Delivery Portfolio Board is still awaited, however the current understanding is that there is no intention to change the target for this year. The Committee were advised this will be discussed again at a future meeting.

Adam outlined risks to the timely delivery of the programme, which include over-optimistic forecasts; inflation increasing the costs in materials, impacting scheme costs and viability; adverse weather conditions during the winter months; delays caused by incidents as teams move across to work on this priority activity; and industrial action. There was an EA strike day on 18 January and further strike action planned for 8 February 2023.

Total capital funding available to the North West RFCC 2022/23 programme is £114.610 Million. This includes £98.375 Million of FCRM Grant-in-Aid (FCRMGiA), £6.2 Million of Local Levy, and £10.025 Million of Partnership Funding Contributions. Forecasts at mid-November 2022 showed the North West is expecting to draw down £110.415 Million this year. This is £4.195 Million less than allocated, and £10.327 Million less than the forecasts reported at the October 2022 meeting. Projects such as Preston South Ribble and Kendal are both contributing circa £6 Million to the reduction in expenditure.

For information Adam noted that the Preston project team estimated that a 4-week delay during the construction phase can result in an expenditure reduction of £2-3 Million. He conveyed that having several large spending projects in our programme does mean that we can see significant expenditure forecast changes at programme level across both this year and next year.

Members noted at the end of November 2022, actual spend is 53% of the full year forecast. The EA schemes have spent 69% of their forecast, with £27 Million still left to spend and Local Authority (LA) schemes have claimed 17.5% of their forecast, with £21.54 Million still to claim.

A summary by strategic partnership, was provided to show what is outstanding on grant claims. Adam highlighted the significant amount of funding yet to be claimed by LAs and asked for claims to be submitted as soon as possible.

EA revenue funding for the North West in 2022/23 currently totals £21.956 Million. This includes staff costs, maintenance, and revenue project information.

Adam advised the Local Levy income for 2022/23 is £4.284 Million, as agreed by the RFCC at its meeting in October 2021. The Local Levy balance at the start of the year was £11.483 Million. The allocation for the 2022/23 programme was £10.844 Million and forecasts at mid-August 2022 indicated we will draw down £10.648 Million, which is £196K under our allocation. If the Local Levy outturn this year is as currently forecast, the remaining balance at the end of this year will be £5.119 Million. Members heard there have been no significant changes to the expenditure scenario since October 2022.

Members were advised there have been no additional requests for Local Levy contributions to FCRM schemes for this quarter, but were advised a briefing note is likely to come to the April 2023 RFCC Finance Subgroup meeting regarding the cost increases on the West Kirby Scheme. The Committee were advised the preferred approach to fund this increase is through additional contributions from the Local Authority and FCRMGiA.

Looking ahead to 2023/24, Adam Walsh provided us with a summary of the North West FCRM GiA capital allocation which is £85.1 Million. This is made up of capital maintenance, defence and property level resilience schemes.

Members were advised the North West bid was £114.5 Million and the original indicative allocation received was £80.95 Million. Adam advised following Local Choices and a further confidence review of projects in December, the total programme investment is now £98.284 Million, of which £85.1 Million is FCRM GiA. This reflects a number of significant

reductions in project forecasts such as Kendal, Little Bispham to Bispham (Coastal Protection Scheme), and Penketh and Whittle. The detail of some of the big spending projects was also provided, which represents circa 70% of the overall project expenditure for next year.

Adam highlighted the funding allocated to the support and enabling programme, noting this is still to receive the Capital Asset Reconditioning allocation.

The Committee heard the North West is over-programmed by £11.5 Million in 2023/24 and noted the importance of this to support the delivery of the capital allocation. Adam advised delivery is not slowing down and progress on the programme will be monitored and responded to accordingly.

On the revenue maintenance allocation for 2023/24 Members were referred to detail in section 4 in the national paper. Compared with the allocation for 2022/23 of £11.88 Million (for asset maintenance only), 2023/24 allocations will be no less than 95% and no more than 110% of the 2022/23 initial allocation.

Councillor Karen Shore questioned the zero Grant in Aid figure for Cheshire Mid Mersey advising she would like further information. Adrian Lythgo advised that this is not because there are no Cheshire Mid Mersey pipeline schemes, it is because there is no expenditure falling in the 2023/24 year, rather falling into the following years, but emphasised the Committee would very much like to see all delivery being brought forward where possible.

Ben Scott advised Councillor Shore a conversation can be taken offline with Ollie Hope and this will be followed up outside of the meeting.

Resolved:

Following the recommendations from the RFCC Finance Sub Group Meeting, the Committee:

- Noted the progress on delivering the 2022/23 capital and resource (formerly known as revenue) programmes
- Noted the current/future position of the Local Levy programme and latest spend forecast
- Approved the overall Local Levy programme for 2023/24 (Appendix B)
- Noted the allocation principles and capital programme prioritisation criteria
- Noted the FCRM GiA capital allocations and asset maintenance resource allocations
- Consented the FCRM GiA Capital and resource allocations for 2023/24.

Adrian Lythgo thanked Members for the discussion and advised the RFCC consenting of the revenue and capital programs for 2023/24 enables the EA Board for them to consent the whole programme.

There were no further comments or questions.

23 (09) RFCC Business Plan – Progress report and 2023/24 investment decisions

Sally Whiting provided an overview of the report summarising progress on implementation of the Business Plan towards the end of the first year. At this point in the year we are able to provide a good picture of how projects have developed and been scoped, the likely spend forecast for this year, and the anticipated investment needs for next year.

Originally there were 16 projects, which has now increased to 21 projects having been reported to and approved by the RFCC during the year. A couple of projects have been combined and the majority of them are progressing well. Three projects are currently under review/on hold.

Members noted the total allocation for the Business Plan for 2022/23 is £1.53 Million and forecasts currently show we are going to spend around £950K. A breakdown of allocations and spend forecast was provided across the five different ambitions of the Business Plan. One of the ambitions was showing no spend at all, but Sally advised the level of spend is not necessarily an indication of progress, providing an example where good progress has been made but using a student (and therefore no cost) resource.

Sally highlighted the ambitions where there has been significant spend – 1) Increasing RMA capacity and collaboration, which includes all the funding for additional capacity, and 2) Building Community Resilience, which includes The Flood Hub and ongoing community engagement resourcing support. These are the areas of the Business Plan where there were existing ongoing projects and initiatives.

Sally proposed an allocation for next year of £1.384 Million, based on the estimated needs of the projects, which is slightly lower than in 2022/23 and provided a graph breaking this down by ambition. She also made it clear the proposed allocation for 2023/24 is already incorporated into the Local Levy programme scenario for 2023/24.

Members heard there is a new project proposal coming under the Accessing Investment and Funding ambition of the Business Plan. Under the ambition it says the Committee would look to support some innovative green finance initiatives and Sally reminded Members of the Ignition Project, presented to them at the April 2022 meeting by Matt Ellis, which was a project in Greater Manchester to develop a SuDS retrofitting programme funded through blended investment.

The Ignition Project has now finished and the information gathered from it has now been taken forward into a piece of work, Project RAINCOAT. Members heard Matt Ellis had presented the detail of this to the Finance Sub Group in January, to request support for the project, where the Finance Sub Group discussed the request.

Adrian Lythgo highlighted the request for Local Levy funding is to enable innovative finance to be brought together to progress the project. He advised the Levy funding is really needed to look at how revenue capacity can be provided to keep a multi-year

programme moving and the learning from the project would be spread across the RFCC area.

The Committee were advised there has been some concern from other areas with regard to setting a precedent for SuDS retrofit programmes across all of the areas and it was clarified that the proposed RFCC support was designed to support learning around multi year programmes rather than the specific focus of SuDS. This is reflected in the framing of the recommendation from the Finance Sub Group, which is to approve in principle only the first year's financial contribution to allow the contractual negotiations to go forward with the other parties, and then for the decision to come back to the Finance Sub Group and then the full RFCC before any further allocations are made.

Neville Elstone asked the Committee to consider the project and following discussion the RFCC agreed an in principle £50K contribution for the first year of the project, to allow work to progress to satisfactory conclusion of contractual negotiations, establishment of outcome measures, and final approval of further funding at that stage.

Adrian Lythgo thanked Members for their support.

Sally Whiting referred Members to the project highlights within the Business Plan report.

Sarah Fontana was introduced to the Committee and provided Members with an overview of her role as Senior LA Capital Project Advisor and the work she has been doing with the LA Capital Project Advisors team.

For a number of years the Committee has been funding a team of LA Capital Project Advisors who work closely with LAs to help support the development of business cases and the assurance of those projects. Following a review of these roles the Committee also agreed to support an additional resource, around a year ago, to be a Senior Advisor overseeing the LA Capital Project Advisors, to make sure this resource was meeting the needs of the LAs and being effective and efficient.

Sarah explained some of the challenges and issues that are being worked through across the North West including:

- Lack of confidence in delivery of the LA-led programme across parts of the NW
- Lack of confidence in systems and gaps in reported data
- Difficulty in retaining/ recruiting skilled and competent staff
- EA forms and processes not always being clear to external partners
- Level of support provided and clarity of roles are not always clear across the NW

Members heard about the challenge for Programming Teams in monitoring and reporting on the programme without timely updates to spend forecasts from LAs during the financial year, so Sarah encouraged LAs to do this.

Sarah highlighted the challenges in recruiting competent and skilled staff, within the EA and LAs. Work has been underway to reach out to graduates to try and develop their careers in flood risk, but highlighted some authorities are having to carry out multiple recruitment drives to get qualified staff, which in itself takes a lot of time and resource.

Work is underway to look at the EA forms and processes, which need to be completed and followed for project assurance and delivery. The forms to apply for funding have been identified as not user friendly and some authorities are experiencing issues in completing them.

There are some short-term actions being put in place around data accuracy, clarity of roles and clarification of training requirements. Sarah also highlighted the priority of ensuring there is adequate training for the new Cumbria Local Authority Projects Advisor, who starts in her role next week, along with reconvening national conversations to explore new business delivery models.

Members were then advised of the medium-term actions, including:

- Producing a clear training plan for LAs to access.
- Ensuring PSO Leads and LA Capital Project Advisors are competent and clear in their roles.
- Encouraging early engagement with the programme refresh work, building strong pipelines and avoiding rushed submissions.
- The reviewing and inputting into proposed changes to forms and processes.

With regard to this last medium-term action Members heard the National Task and Finish Group have suggested some changes to forms and processes and they are now looking at improving the forms that LAs have to submit.

Sarah highlighted there are some changes to the Grant Memorandum and changes to the Partnership Funding calculator being looked at. The North West have offered to pilot some of these changes and the first draft of one of the FCRM forms used to submit grant claims has recently been received.

Longer term aims include ensuring the LA programme is integrated with the EA programme and projects are able to utilise appropriate resources; establishing a strong pipeline of projects with involvement from all Stakeholders, and having a fully resourced and competent advisor team supporting LA delivery across the North West.

Adrian Lythgo thanked Sarah for her presentation and advised Members to follow up offline with Sarah should they need any further information.

Laura Bigley highlighted that Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFAs) have all got Flood Risk Management Strategies with actions and objectives around funding and investment and making sure that is well supported. She advised a large part of that work is working with the LA Capital Project Advisors. She highlighted there are actions within the Lancashire FRM Strategy that she would like to see incorporated, as some of the actions could be regionalised and provide benefit for everybody. Sarah thanked Laura for this information and will follow this up outside of the meeting.

RFCC Business Plan Governance

Sally Whiting set out the proposed RFCC Business Plan governance structure, its framework and principles which have been based on programme management models, applied in a proportionate way, reflecting the level of investment and risk.

This will be delivered through a four-level governance structure with the RFCC as the Sponsoring group at the top, setting the investment levels and overall direction. This will then be underpinned by the Finance Sub Group (under the new name of the Finance and Business Assurance Subgroup) acting as Programme Board, which is a step closer to the detail, monitoring progress and guiding levels of investment in the individual ambitions and projects.

Sally then briefly covered the role of the lead partnerships for each of the ambitions, including suggested membership of the Ambition Steering Groups. Members heard the lead partnership will provide the administration and the coordination and the reporting lead role for the ambition through the partnership coordinator. Senior EA and LA officers will sit on the Steering Group, as appropriate. There is also the proposal for the lead partnership to provide an elected member to sit on the steering group to provide their perspective, if that feels appropriate to the partnership.

At the project level, they will all have their own project governance, applied at a proportionate level, again depending on the cost and the risks associated.

Sally highlighted for the full RFCC meetings an annual review of Business Plan performance will be programmed in at the January meeting. There will then be lighter updates provided at the other meetings and at some point in the future, the RFCC will need to trigger a refresh of the Business Plan at the appropriate time.

Sally advised she has not received any feedback or comments on this work since it was presented to the Finance Sub Group in January and advised she is hoping to embed this new governance in the next couple of months to have it formally up and running by the start of the next financial year.

Adrian Lythgo thanked Sally for this report and reiterated that the Committee are committing approximately £1 Million of funding to the business plan. He highlighted the importance of having appropriate governance in place so that we have transparency of what we are spending and what we are achieving.

Resolved: The Committee supported the proportionate approach to the governance of the Business Plan.

23 (10) RFCC Finance and Business Assurance Sub Group Draft Terms of Reference

Sally Whiting advised there have been several discussions over the years about reviewing the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the RFCC Finance Sub Group and introduced the proposal provided within the papers.

Members heard the proposal does not involve radical changes but is rather a formalisation of current arrangements, given the new focus on the Business Plan. She highlighted those elements of the Terms of Reference which are changed or new, including changing the name of the sub group to reflect its broader remit than finance alone.

Sally advised there will be three main elements of business: the capital investment programme, the revenue maintenance programme (EA main river) and the RFCC Business Plan.

For the revenue maintenance programme, Sally advised the intention is to provide the group with a little more detail for Members to be able to approve and consent the maintenance programme with a bit more knowledge and detail.

In addition, the new ToR formalise the opportunity for the Subgroup to recommend or request deeper dives into specific issues, such as the meeting to discuss inflation impacts earlier this year.

With regard to membership of the group, the proposal is to formalise this to include the Chair, five RFCC LLFA Elected Members, and two RFCC EA Appointed Members.

Sally then detailed the proposed Membership changes advising there will also be a formal nomination of deputies should a Member be unable to attend and advised voting arrangements have also been made clearer and more formal with a specified quorum. The Committee noted the subgroup membership has always been based broadly on one elected Member for each Partnership, with an open invitation for other Members to attend, but the Membership is being formalised so at least one elected member of each Partnership should be in attendance, and then within a system of formal nomination of Deputies in the same way the attendance to full Committee meetings is carried out.

Sally advised there will then be two EA appointed independent Members, noting that some appointed Members have been regularly attending subgroup meetings for a period of time, but this will now formalise them as a component of the membership to formalise their voting rights.

Finally, the formal voting arrangements will be based on the Chair plus four of the five elected members and their deputies. The independent members will not be part of the quorum.

Adrian thanked Sally for her presentation and Members were asked to advise if they wished to adopt the revised ToR.

Resolved: The RFCC approved the adoption of the revised ToR for the RFCC Finance Sub Group.

23 (11) Coastal Update

Carl Green and Suzana Ilic provided Members with an overview of some of the issues being discussed by the North West and North Wales Coastal Group including sea level rise and the approach the Coastal Group have been taking, planning, monitoring evidence, how the Coastal Group is addressing the skills gaps and details of how the group is working together through its responsibilities under the RFCC Business Plan.

Suzana Ilic highlighted recent newspaper coverage of coastal changes, the potential consequences of coastal change, along with detail of several studies done in recent years including the Government's Climate Change Risk Assessment. Members heard that only yesterday The Guardian newspaper had provided an article on the coast and had presented a picture of the whole of the country's coastline.

The Committee noted conversations are taking place, both indirectly and directly, with two local communities with regard to the next Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) policy. Suzana noted the hold the line policy moving to managed realignment will involve more pressures and more challenges, which will include finding the path of how to transfer from one policy to another with different communities.

Suzana highlighted the uncertainty around sea level rise and advised Members that NASA has freely available data where the public can go and look at sea level rise predictions.

Members noted the significant pressure from coastal flooding in the future and were advised Defra has suggested several ways to improve coastal adaptations. Legal questions and challenges are being looked into with regard to managed realignment, along with economic factors such as funding and insurance, engagement, and defining the thresholds of changes. Members noted that not only residential properties are at risk, but also businesses, historical heritage, agriculture and critical infrastructure.

Suzana advised further studies are taking place with regard to hold the line policies, to see if they can be more sustainable for a longer period of time. Members heard areas of the North West is being included in this study and details of this will be provided at a future meeting.

Mark Ellis introduced himself to Members and provided a brief overview of the National Coastal Erosion Risk Mapping 2 (NFCERM2), which shows best estimates of coastal erosion rates for the 3 epochs (short term (0-20 years), medium term (20-50 years) and long term (50 – 100 years)), advising that it shows coastal recession rates based on the no active intervention scenario and with the implementation of Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) policies.

He advised this work is updating the coastal erosion estimates based on the latest scientific methodology and data and is being carried out in two phases. Phase 1 was completed in October 2022, which identified where scientific improvements and application of new datasets could be made to improve erosion predictions, which include:

- Establishing underlying coastal recession rates by using the latest datasets collected through the National Network of Regional Monitoring Programmes and other sources
- Updating predictions of the effects of sea level rise on erosion rates
- Including predictions for complex cliffs which are currently not included in the NCERM
- Assessing risk to receptors where it is significantly impacted by the presence of defence structures and the chance and timing of defence failure.
- SMP Refresh – incorporating the sub-divisions of SMP policies into NCERM and using SMP trackers to ensure NCERM reflects the most up to date management

- intent for each SMP
- Combination of erosion and defence deterioration/failure timelines to provide final recession predictions.

Members heard that Phase 2 is now in progress and data is currently being collected and the risk mapping is being updated. This information will be published by the end of 2023.

Work is also underway on producing the coastal baseline and engagement for this will take place over the next few months. There is some verification engagement on the complex cliffs and then local verification of the results will be required. Members noted the project is trying to minimise what's needing to be done by the LAs, but some work will need to be carried out by them to help with the verification of the outputs.

Due to time restrictions Adrian Lythgo asked that the Coastal Update should now be paused and suggested a further session be included on the April RFCC meeting agenda, including feedback and reflections from the North West and North Wales Coast and Climate Change Conference in late March. He thanked Suzana for her presentation and advised this has clearly shown both the academic and the actual evidence of increased flood risk on the coast.

Adrian encouraged Members to attend the Coastal Conference.

23 (12) Any Other Business

Members noted no items of any other business had been received in advance of the meeting.

Adrian Lythgo advised he specifically wanted to mention Councillor Keith Little who has been unable to attend the meeting today, and highlighted it would have been his final meeting as Cumbria County Council ceases to exist as a local authority. He thanked Keith for being an exemplary member of this Committee, noting he had made the case for investment in Cumbria with clarity and passion but had also supported colleagues across the North West in investment in their areas to address identified flood risk.

Adrian advised he would like to write to Keith formally to thank him on behalf of the Committee, which Members were happy to support.

Adrian also advised the Committee of the retirement in March of Keith Ashcroft, EA Area Director for Cumbria and Lancashire. He advised Keith has been a first rate contributor to this Committee and has provided support to a number of individual Members. He thanked Keith for his massive contribution to Cumbria and Lancashire and also to this Committee, advising that he will also receive a letter of thanks on behalf of the Committee.

Adrian Lythgo also highlighted the consultation on the implementation of Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, specifically around SuDS approval bodies, Adrian advised he will write to LA contacts to devise a way of capturing individual consultation responses and then the Committee can put together a RFCC response. He noted this will require us to build in a little bit of leeway between the deadline for LA

submissions and that of the Committee and advised if anyone is not comfortable with this approach to let him know outside of the meeting.

Adrian handed over to Keith Ashcroft, who gave his thanks to Adrian and to his predecessor Derek Antrobus, advising we've probably got an unrivalled sense of confidence and collaboration on such a challenging issue that the region faces and he thanked the flood experts, partners and colleagues around him.

Keith reflected on 36 years of public service, which started in Lancashire County Council. He noted when he returned to the North West 20 years ago we didn't really talk about flooding, and climate change was discussed as something in the future and how things have now changed.

He noted his time as Area Director for GMMC when he helped initiate and support the Warrington Flood Risk Management Scheme, which was finished just in time for its highest ever river levels and he highlighted the challenge in making the case for the scheme.

During his time in the North West Keith reflected on storms' Desmond and Eva, which were immensely challenging and traumatic and continue to be traumatic for communities across the North West.

Keith advised he is massively proud of what the teams have achieved during the last few years, including the schemes at Cockermouth, Kendal and Carlisle, Workington and Egremont and the coast at Lytham.

Members heard Keith is to take up the role of Chair of the Lake District Foundation.

Adrian wished Keith all the best for the future.

Adrian thanked Members for attending and closed the meeting.