

# North West Regional Flood and Coastal Committee

## Minutes of the meeting held on Friday, 21 April 2023

(Virtual meeting held on MS Teams)

### Present

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 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 Laura Crane (Cheshire Mid Mersey Strategic Flood Risk Partnership)  
Councillor Elizabeth Grey (Merseyside Strategic Flood Risk Partnership)  
Neville Elstone (EA Appointed Member - General Business and Assurance)  
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)  
Perry Hobbs (EA Appointed Member – Water Industry)  
Paul Barnes (EA Appointed Member – Agriculture)  
Stewart Davies, EA Board Member

### Also in attendance

Doug Coyle, Cumbria Strategic Flood Risk Partnership  
Andrew Harrison, Cumbria Strategic Flood Risk Partnership  
Marcus Leigh, Lancashire Strategic Flood Risk Partnership  
Laura Bigley, Lancashire Strategic Flood Risk Partnership  
Clare Nolan-Barnes, Lancashire Strategic Flood Risk Partnership  
Councillor James Shorrocks, Blackburn with Darwen Council  
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  
Sarah Wardle, Merseyside Strategic Flood Risk Partnership  
Paul Wisse, Sefton Council  
Samantha Godfrey, Sefton Council  
Sharma Jencitis, United Utilities (UU)  
Len Harris, Wyre Council  
Martin Evans, Manchester University  
Emma Shuttleworth, Manchester University

### **Environment Agency Officers Present**

Ian Crewe, Area Director, Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire (GMMC)  
Ollie Hope, Area Flood and Coastal Risk Manager (GMMC)  
Nick Pearson, Area Flood and Coastal Risk Manager (GMMC)  
Adam Walsh, FCRM Programming Manager (Cumbria & Lancashire)  
Ben Robinson, FCRM Programming Manager (GMMC)  
Rachel Harmer, RFCC Secretariat Officer (GMMC)  
Sarah Fontana, Senior LA Capital Projects Advisor (GMMC)  
Gary Hilton, Local Authority Capital Projects Advisor (GMMC)  
Rachael Broadhurst, Local Authority Capital Projects Advisor (GMMC)  
Stuart Mault, FCRM Programming Advisor (C&L)  
Fran Clarkson, FCRM PSO Team Leader (GMMC)  
Dave Brown, Senior FCRM Advisor (GMMC)  
Dave Kennedy, Senior FCRM Advisor (C&L)  
Gary Jones-Wright, Senior FCRM Advisor (C&L)  
Mia Mullender, FCRM Programming Advisor (C&L)  
Kerry Harmer, FCRM Operations Manager (C&L)

#### Observers:

Chloe Boyle, Marine Management Organisation (MMO)  
Anup Shah, Member of the public

## **23 (13) Welcome and Chairman's Introduction**

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

Adrian asked Members if there were any objections to the meeting being recorded, purely for the purposes of minute taking. There were no objections from Members.

The Committee were advised presentation slides will be used throughout the meeting, which have been circulated in advance. Adrian advised if anyone wished to make a contribution to the meeting at any point, then to use the hands-up function on MS Teams.

Adrian noted that no declarations of interest have been received.

Members were advised it is the first meeting for Councillor Giles Archibald, who represents the newly created Westmorland and Furness Council, which together with Cumberland Council cover the area formerly covered by Cumbria County Council. Members noted Councillor Archibald will be the formal RFCC Member for these two new councils for the next 12 months.

Adrian advised this is also the first meeting for Ian Crewe, the new Environment Agency (EA) Area Director for Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire (GMMC) and Members noted Ian will be the lead NW Area Director supporting the work of the NW RFCC.

Members approved and supported the correctly nominated substitution of Paul Wisse for Councillor Ian Moncur, who has sent apologies for today's meeting.

A number of people, who are helping with the meeting, including; Emma Shuttleworth and Martin Evans from Manchester University helping with the item on Natural Flood Management (NFM) and catchment approaches; and Len Harris from Wyre Council who is supporting the coastal item, were welcomed to the meeting, along with Anup Shah, a member of the public, here to observe the meeting.

Adrian highlighted his quarterly report, circulated on 6<sup>th</sup> April and advised he will take this as read. He noted a letter received from Alan Lovell, the new EA Chairman, which has been circulated to Committee Members and advised much of which is in this letter will be covered in today's agenda item 5. He highlighted the detail within the annex to the letter which reports the North West RFCC's £92.6 Million Grant in Aid (GiA) allocation for 2023/24, which is the second highest regional allocation nationally, which the NW RFCC will welcome and Adrian advised this figure does, however, reflect the level of flood risk that our communities face in the North West.

The Committee were advised in slight contrast the letter also advises the NW RFCC have received an allocation of £11.5 Million for EA Asset Maintenance work for 2023/24, which is more in the normal range for RFCCs and an area which we will continue to focus on.

Adrian highlighted the information papers, advising that three of the four papers relate to the delivery of the NW RFCC Business Plan. Members heard the United Utilities (UU) report includes detail on catchment approaches and other activities and he suggested this should be looked at in more depth at Strategic Partnership Group Meetings. He noted the Flood Risk Management Plan (FRMP) paper, an update on the second cycle FRMP, which shows an update on the strategic flood risk for the North West, which Members may consider in the context of looking at flood risk in each of the Strategic Partnership Group areas.

Members heard the main discussion items for today's meeting also cover areas which are important in the Business Plan, covering catchment approaches, NFM and land management, along with a coastal discussion following on from the recent coastal conference.

Ian Crewe introduced himself to the Committee advising it is a privilege to join this very important Committee. He advised he has spent the last 30 years in the Police Force in Merseyside and Greater Manchester, where he has a lot of experience in the area. Ian advised latterly he was the District Commander for Central Manchester and more recently he was Head of Major Incidents at Greater Manchester Police, as the Detective Superintendent in charge of homicide and organised crime.

He advised he has been in the EA for about 6 weeks, where he has lots of transferable skills but there is a lot to learn and subject matter is more important. He advised this is a challenge well worth rising to and looks forward to ongoing relationships with the Committee.

Adrian thanked Ian for this introduction and advised the Committee are looking forward to working with him.

Councillor Giles Archibald introduced himself to Members and thanked Adrian for allowing a member and an observer from the two new councils to attend the meeting.

He advised he lives in Kendal, which has been affected by Storm Desmond and advised he is grateful for the work ongoing in Kendal right now. Councillor Archibald advised he has just completed a master's degree in climate change and biodiversity at the University of London and is the portfolio holder for climate change and biodiversity at Westmorland and Furness Council. He advised he is interested in acting as a Councillor to address these issues along with Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) in relation to managing flooding, which has been mentioned by David Harpley, and he raised the other issue that he would like to bring to this Committee is the problem of sewerage overflow. He thanked the Committee for all that it does and advised that Cumbria is very grateful.

Adrian Lythgo advised he is very much looking forward to working with colleagues in the north of the North West under the new government arrangements and they are very welcome.

Adrian Lythgo advised as far as the Local Authorities (LAs) are concerned we have entered the pre-election period and he knows this is a very busy period for those LAs who have elections on their patch and thanked them for their attendance today.

## **23 (14) Apologies for Absence**

Adrian Lythgo noted apologies for absence from: Councillor Daniel Barrington, Councillor Ian Moncur and Councillor Tony Brennan (Merseyside Strategic Flood Risk Partnership); Carl Green (Chair of the North West and North Wales Coastal Group); Fran Comyn (Greater Manchester Strategic Flood Risk Partnership); Jim Turton (Cheshire Mid Mersey Strategic Flood Risk Partnership); Lorah Cheyne (Lancashire Strategic Flood Risk Partnership); Sally Whiting, EA RFCC Senior Advisor (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 (15) Minutes of the RFCC Meeting held on 27 January 2023**

Adrian Lythgo asked if there were any comments on the draft minutes from the meeting on 27 January 2023. Councillor Archibald advised that David Harpley had made a good comment in the minutes and enquired how the Committee follows up these comments.

Adrian Lythgo advised in terms of specific actions we have an item on matters arising, and for those things that are discussed at a meeting which do not specifically lead to an action these are very much up to the Members of the Committee to take back to their Strategic Partnership meetings to take forward. He noted that if anyone feels like actions are missing from Matters Arising then it will get raised here.

Adrian also highlighted an item regarding the Stannah Pumping Station in Lancashire, which we asked to be taken offline. Members were advised this has been followed up since the meeting and there are ongoing discussions, but there have been some changes in responsibility for those involved. He advised Rachel Harmer, who looks after the Committee, will keep a running list of items to be taken up offline in order for them to be kept in view and the item Councillor Archibald raised will be added to this list. The minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2023 were proposed by Councillor Ray Mashiter and seconded by Councillor Jane Hugo.

There were no further comments.

## **23 (16) Matters arising and actions from the last meeting**

Adrian Lythgo advised there are three actions from the last meeting which have each been addressed and resolved.

There were no further comments or questions.

## **23 (17) Flood Incidents Update**

Adrian Lythgo advised no reports of any major flooding during the last quarter have been formally raised. For the benefit of new Members, Adrian advised this is a standing item on the agenda so that colleagues can raise specific impacts of flooding. He noted the Committee formally monitors the flooding recorded by the constituent authorities within the Committee area.

There were no further comments.

## **23 (18) Managing Water on a Catchment Scale with Nature**

Adrian Lythgo advised the discussion in this session very much features in the delivery of the North West RFCC Business Plan and he introduced David Harpley, Dave Brown and David Kennedy here to present the item.

Dave Brown (Senior Advisor from the EA) provided Members with an overview of the recent national Natural Flood Management (NFM) Evaluation Report ([link](#)) of the 2018 to 2021 Defra catchment and community scale £15 Million funding to carry out NFM. Members heard key findings from the work, including strong partnership working and the fact that it takes a lot of strong local knowledge and leadership to deliver NFM projects; sticking points included clarity on future maintenance responsibilities. When valuing the benefits of NFM projects they were found to reduce runoff and could store significant volumes of water, but benefits were less accurately predictable for NFM interventions when compared to conventional methods such as building flood walls.

Members also noted that a lighter touch for NFM approval is required, as currently compliance with the full business case approval is quite difficult for some of the smaller projects, and further detail on this is forthcoming. The updated, second version of the Working with Natural Processes Evidence Directory will also to be available later this year, containing more evidence and worked examples. Dave advised that nationally across England, NFM interventions to date provide at least 1.6 million metres cubed of flood water storage capacity upstream of 15,000 homes and within that helped to restore 610 kilometres of river, 4000 hectares of habitat has been created or improved, and 100 hectares of woodland planted. Therefore, not only are there improved benefits to the flood risk to homes downstream, other elements of habitat have been created and improved, which all fits in with the 25 Year Environment Plan.

In the NW between 2018 and 2021, the delivery totals so far are: 210,000 m<sup>3</sup> of additional flood storage created; 219 Ha of woodland (220,000 hard wood trees) and 243 Ha of wet grassland restored; contributed to improving 110 km watercourse contributing to Good Ecological Potential; Flood risk reduced risk to 26 communities at risk (C@R) (894 properties – but no (as yet) proven change in risk band).

Members were shown photographs of NFM work that has been carried out at Smithills (near Bolton), Stalybridge and locations in Cumbria.

Adrian Lythgo noted the caution being taken with regard to moving properties from one risk band to another as a result of work being carried out to reduce their risk of flooding and asked if this is still the case even after the introduction of the intermediate risk bands approximately 18 months ago. Dave Brown advised the intermediate response is less challenging to prove and more feasible to achieve and there is good data and evidence to support it and greater confidence that this way of working and can be relied upon going forward. Dave highlighted that for some small community-led projects, there is a concern that more money could be spent on justifying the intervention than on its implementation and highlighted that a small Local Levy capital pot for NFM delivery for small, community projects would assist delivery.

Paul Barnes commented that the NFM review was carried out by the managers who implemented it and that it would have more credibility if the review had been done independently. Dave Brown noted Paul's comment and advised it is his understanding that the evidence review will be carried out by independent consultants.

Councillor Alan Quinn asked about the re-naturalisation of rivers and if this is the way of describing putting the meanders and bends back into the rivers that were originally there. Dave Brown advised this is correct and by doing this it makes it easier for the floodplain and the river to connect, which in turn attenuates and reduces the peaks of water, therefore reducing the risk of flooding to locations downstream.

David Kennedy highlighted in addition to the Working with Natural Processes Review, close working has taken place with Lancaster University, whose 'Q-NFM' project was funded by NERC. Many of the NFM features have been monitored over the last 6 years and have produced some excellent data.

Members were shown a short video that has been produced to show how the flow of floodwater and rivers can be reduced by slowing the flow of water on the land. A further video showing the work being undertaken on the moors above Stalybridge was shown and Dave Brown provided information on work being done in collaboration with Manchester University and Moors for the Future, on their NERC funded 'NFM-Protect' project.

Martin Evans from Manchester University provided Members with an overview of the three NERC projects looking at NFM. These are Q-NFM (quantifying NFM benefits), NFM-Protect (moorland restoration) and 'Landwise' (looking at farming practices and flooding).

With regard to peat restoration, Councillor Giles Archibald advised Cumbria has thousands of hectares of peat that is very badly degraded and he is interested in how we can bring together the different agencies to discuss the different benefits to make sure that action is taken to do something about it. Martin Evans advised that, at a recent policy forum, work on this was presented and the discussion was centred around how various funding strands can be pulled together so that multiple benefits can be recognised and delivered. He noted that combined efforts are well worth the investment, but it's the policy challenge that needs to be clarified.

Adrian Lythgo advised as an RFCC we have very much taken the view that we can play into and try to affect those national level policy debates and in addition to that, through the RFCC Business Plan, we can try to collaborate at scale on specific projects.

With regard to the RFCC Business Plan 'Managing Water at Catchment Scale' theme Perry Hobbs highlighted the opportunity mapping work underway, which includes; where and how we build our flood interventions to produce multi benefits, whilst still allowing the landowners to make a living from the land, by bringing together the right partners and corralling funding. He also noted the work being carried out in the Integrated Water Management Plan for Greater Manchester, by bringing key partners together to lead work on looking at water systems, what we need to do where, and how we try and join up our work and our funding to deliver multiple outcomes and share learning.

Paul Barnes commented on Landscape ELMS and in line with Neville Elstone he questioned the catchment areas of 500 hectares, advising that catchment areas need to be much bigger. He also noted the roughness and coarseness on the water flow over the peat areas called the Manning's Effect.

Adrian Lythgo summarised that what the Committee is looking for are opportunities to intervene at catchment scale and advised the presentation has really reinforced the importance of doing the right interventions in the right places. At the beginning of the NFM programme it was about getting interventions in where you could. He noted the evidence that we're getting from this is about what are the right combination of interventions in the right places. This is really important and informs that opportunity mapping.

Adrian advised that as a committee we have just been talking about trying to take this work forward and it would be good if the Committee could find opportunities in each of the five sub-regional partnership areas to be able to try and work on. He advised this is the direction of the business plan and he welcomes all of the Members' input into that continuing development.

Councillor Giles Archibald said that in his opinion not enough had been done to restore peat at a landscape scale and suggested that as individual Councils they did not have the resources to take this forward, that an overarching programme and project plan should be set up and resourced. David Harpley advised a partnership exists across the north of England called 'The Great North Bog', which includes a number of partners.

Emma Shuttleworth advised of Manchester University's involvement in the working up of data from a lot of the projects of the Yorkshire Peat Partnership, which is a 3–4-year programme, where data will be informing the baseline for the restoration work. Members noted there is a hope this work will continue, funding permitting, where the land can be monitored for the next 25 years in order to see the long-term benefits of restoration.

Adrian Lythgo advised it is worth reflecting this Committee has funded peat restoration in Cumbria and in Greater Manchester and highlighted what the Committee is impatient to do is to build on those pilots, so that we're investing in the right stacked interventions for the most effective flood risk management interventions for communities which are at risk. He noted it is about getting the right combinations and working with the right landowners to try and identify the best opportunities for doing that. This comes up in most of our discussions about the business plan and how we take it forward, but that doesn't in any way change the specifics of peat that has just been discussed.

Dave Kennedy provided Members with an overview of work that is being carried out in Cumbria on the back of the NFM programme as part of the Defra pilot Flood Resilience Innovation Programme. Members noted that Cumbria were successful in being awarded £6.6 Million of investment and whilst this has a NFM focus, it effectively has 6 work streams with NFM being just one of them. The Committee were advised Lancaster University are working with the EA to build on the knowledge already in place (via Q-NFM), so that evidence is built up over a credible length of time using the same sort of methodologies, establishing more assurance about what the benefits are of the key learning points from the NFM programme.

Dave Kennedy highlighted the importance of, when talking to landowners, having a trusted intermediary in place and therefore two Natural England Catchment Sensitive Farming



Officers have been employed to help with this work. This has many benefits and has also opened up the option for being able to bring in additional funding through the Countryside Stewardship scheme and then beyond that it is hoped through Environmental Land Management.

Members noted the other area of heavy focus has been the work on community preparedness and resilience within communities themselves, building on the work Carolyn Otley has led in Cumbria, supporting groups such as Cockermouth Emergency Response Group. United Utilities and National Highways are also working in partnership with the EA and Councils to see how work can be co-designed to get multiple benefits.

Councillor Stephen Clarke advised the Lancashire partnership are working to do as much NFM as possible but highlighted more help from the EA is required to take this forward. Dave Brown advised Rob Dyer is the North West Area NFM Appraisal Postholder, who can work with Lancashire and appraise what can be done in terms of NFM delivery.

Adrian Lythgo thanked everyone for their contributions to this item and commented today's discussion shows the evidence is now a lot stronger to allow us to stack benefits and invest in the right interventions in the right places. He advised this is something the Committee will very much come back to and noted the impatience from Members to see these flood risk measures making a difference on the ground.

There were no further comments or questions.

## **23 (19) Report from the RFCC Finance and Business Assurance Sub group**

The following Finance and Business Assurance Sub-Group papers from the 6 April meeting were provided for this item:

- Minutes from the 6 April RFCC Finance and Business Assurance Sub group meeting
- Programme Update Report to the 6 April RFCC Finance and Business Assurance Sub group meeting
- 2023/24 FCERM Grant in Aid (GiA) Final Allocation (National EA paper)

Neville Elstone advised one of the key recommendations from the RFCC Finance and Business Assurance Sub group (RFCC F&BASG) is about the Penketh and Whittle Flood Risk Management Scheme and highlighted the scheme is an example of a case study of many of the problems and issues being encountered in delivering the programme. He noted there are common themes such as inflation, materials, framework, and just getting works moving. Neville noted a key point from this is a thank you to everyone working in Risk Management Authorities (RMAs) in making things happen and acknowledged the challenges.

Neville highlighted the level of budget allocated for the 2023/24 year is similar to that of the 2022/23 year, which is good news.

Ben Robinson stepped through the report, which provides an overview of the North West RFCC 6-year investment programme 2021 - 2027. It provides an overview of progress on delivering the in-year (2022/23) capital (all RMAs) and revenue (EA only) programmes.

## **2022/23 Capital Programme**

This year, the North West programme is forecasting to better protect 3,440 properties from flooding, which is a reduction from 4,337 properties, reported at the January 2023 meeting. This reduction of 897 properties is due to a few projects being pushed back in the programme. Members heard we are not delivering improved protection to fewer homes, but rather these are being reprofiled into future years. To date, this financial year, we have better protected 2,256 properties from flooding in the North West.

Ben highlighted the request to change the 2022/23 target for properties better protected submitted to the national Programme Management Office earlier this year. A target of 3,957 properties was requested instead of the target of 8,162 properties set based on the allocated funding and programme. Members heard the final decision from the National Delivery Portfolio Board has been received, the request to change the target has not been accepted and therefore the North West target will remain at 8162 properties better protected.

Total capital funding available to the North West RFCC 2022/23 programme is £118.975 Million. This includes £98.375 Million of FCRM Grant-in-Aid (FCRMGiA), £10.574 Million of Local Levy (adjusted from the opening allocation of £6.210 Million), and £10.026 Million of Partnership Funding Contributions.

In terms of expenditure, forecasts at mid-February 2023 showed that we are expecting to draw down £107.554 Million this year. This is £11.421 Million less than allocated and £7.226 Million less than the forecasts reported at the January 2023 meeting. Members heard this doesn't mean we are anticipating to spend less, it just means the funding has been reprofiled into future years. Ben advised at the end of January 2023, actual spend was 76% of the full year forecast, which is an improved picture from the 53% reported at the January meeting.

A number of risks to the current programme were noted, some of which have previously been reported and will continue into the coming year. Risks include: over-optimistic forecasts; inflation increasing the costs of materials; lengthy lead times for 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. With regard to the risks associated with materials, this is something that is being monitored so risks can be mitigated as we become aware of them.

There are also risks regarding framework changes. Ben advised we are currently in the process of either transitioning to new or renewed frameworks, which may create a risk in delay for programme delivery, but the risk will be mitigated on a national and local level and it's something that all colleagues are monitoring closely.

Members also noted there will be new legislation in November 2023 for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), when it will become law that all planning applications submitted beyond this point will need to provide 10% BNG for them to be granted.

Against our efficiency target, Ben advised we are significantly under the 10% Grant-in-Aid efficiency target, which remains a condition of the current 6-year Capital Investment Programme. Efficiency reporting was paused for Q1 and Q2 of the first year (2021/22) of the new reporting period, whilst the condition was being negotiated. Since then, there has been a subsequent loss of momentum in reporting nationally due to the impact of the Covid pandemic. As a result, we are now at a total of just over £12 Million (for 2021/22 and at Q3 2022/23 to date) against a cumulative target of £120 Million. Reporting needs to improve dramatically to get back on track to achieve the national 6-year target.

The North West is also significantly under the 10% target having contributed £531K of efficiency savings (for 2021/22 and at Q3 2022/23 to date), against a cumulative target in the region of £20 Million.

Members heard a new approach has been launched nationally in an attempt to improve efficiency reporting utilising Area resources to act as gatekeepers to review submissions. In the North West we are also doing our part, having recently undertaken a soft re-launch of the efficiencies process in the North West, providing training sessions, materials, and a new process map.

## **Local Levy programme and Frequently Flooded Allowance**

Ben then went on to report on the Frequently Flooded Allowance (FFA) announcement that was made on 5 April, which included the following North West schemes:

- Carlisle Appraisal Package
- Appleby Town Centre
- North Road, Holme Village Flood Alleviation
- Burrow Beck Conveyance Improvements
- Lindale Road, Grange over Sands
- Irwell Vale to Chatterton
- Little Bollington, River Bollin Property Level Resilience
- West End Road, St Helens

Some of these schemes were requesting Local Levy contributions which are no longer required. This means that the Levy reserve available at the end of 2023/24 will now be higher. However, we are still forecasting to use up the reserve by the end of 2024/25.

The North West RFCC is expected to start the 2023/24 financial year with a Local Levy balance of £15.143 Million, which includes the income of £4.411 Million plus the balance to be carried forward at the end of 2022/23 of £10.732 Million.

The total allocation for 2023/24 is £8.153 Million. Currently it is anticipated a Local Levy balance of £6.99 Million will be carried into the start of the 2024/25 year. Ben advised this is based on the current Local Levy forecasts and requests and as always is subject to change throughout the year.

## **2022/23 EA Asset Maintenance Programme**

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

Members noted both C&L and GMMC forecasts remain very similar to funding. C&L forecast underspend has improved from £75K under last quarter to £39K under this quarter. The total variance to budget has changed from £56K under last quarter to £30K above budget this quarter.

## **2023/24 Capital Programme**

Ben Robinson provided us with a summary of the North West FCRMGiA capital allocation for 2023/24, which is £85.1 Million and has now been confirmed and approved by the EA Board. We noted this is made up of capital maintenance, defence and property level resilience schemes. It also includes the enabling and support programme (apart from for Asset Reconditioning which is going through its own Local Choices process).

Members noted the 2023/24 Resource Programme has not received its final allocation yet.

Councillor Alan Quinn advised staff turnover remains to be a concern, noting that EA officers are leaving which is also reflected in Local Authorities. He commented that many of the experienced staff are leaving and highlighted the problem of not having the right staff in place to manage projects and the need to start an academy to bring in the next generation of young engineers.

Adrian Lythgo advised the pressure on resource and people across all of the Risk Management Authorities is clearly recognized nationally. He advised it is also worth saying that we are fairly near full employment, which creates the circumstances that Councillor Quinn is concerned about and Adrian noted that as a RFCC we have been trying in a limited way to put resource back into the system including funding posts directly to help the flood programme go forward.

Adrian Lythgo commented that the work being considered by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority utilising their devolved input into skills mentioned by Cllr Quinn is wider than engineers and is seeking to identify and fill gaps across the skills ladder and wider skills needed in addressing climate and water management.

Neville Elstone advised a deeper conversation had taken place regarding this at the RFCC F&BA Sub Group and encouraged people to attend this forum.

Councillor Jane Hugo advised it would be interesting to know at a national level what is being done about the risks around capacity, where funding has already been allocated and now the new legislations, regarding Schedule 3 of the Floods and Water Management Act and Biodiversity Net Gain, that are coming on board are going to take up more energy and effort, noting the funding will not have been built in to those projects as the legislation happened after the funding was allocated.

Ben Robinson advised the National EA Programme Management Office are going through this new legislation with regard to how it might look in terms of cost and resources and how we might best be able to build a resilient programme that includes those factors. He advised the outputs of this are yet to be received and advised he will report back on this at the July meeting.

**ACTION:** Ben Robinson

Ollie Hope advised in terms of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) the EA are in a similar position to the other authorities, in that there is still a significant degree of ambiguity around how we land BNG and what's to be expected in terms of developers. He highlighted there are a number of centres around the county gathering best practice on how existing projects are trying to tackle and overcome the requirement, so this information is being centralised so we can be prepared for when this legislation becomes live.

Councillor Jane Hugo raised concerns from the Lancashire Partnership about projects that have already been agreed and making sure there will be capacity built in to meet these projects.

David Shaw enquired about when projects will fall under the new BNG legislation and was advised it is anything that applies for planning permission after November 2023.

David Harpley commented BNG could be built into Natural Flood Management measures, so in effect it could be used to fund further work the EA might wish to do.

Adrian Lythgo advised he will continue to press national on the resources regarding the Schedule 3 of the Floods and Water Management Act.

There were no further comments.

Ollie Hope provided Members with a brief overview of the Penketh and Whittle Flood Risk Management Scheme and the Local Levy request of £1 Million in addition to the £250K of Local Levy that has already been approved. Members were advised the project was brought to the RFCC FSG last year when it was in its early stages and the project was caught up in the inflationary period following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine.

As detailed in the Investment Programme Report, the Committee were provided with an overview of the approvals history for the project along with challenges the project has encountered to date and noted risks that may yet materialise, which include risks associated with landscaping works, future maintenance provision of BNG site, liaison with Cadent Gas and potential requirements for protection measures to be installed to allow maintenance access to a trash screen, weather and flooding risks causing programme delays and any future challenges with land or water contamination.

Ollie advised the project now requires a robust contingency plan in place. We heard £678K of the additional £1 Million Local Levy requested is to essentially underwrite the risk contingency part of the scheme, which will safeguard against any of the risks from materialising. Members noted if the risks don't materialise then the funding will be released to the Local Levy programme.

Neville Elstone thanked Ollie for his overview and summarised the total of the scheme's Local Levy request is £1.25 Million, which is the total of the £1 Million that is being asked for today and the £250K that has already been approved. He then confirmed the scheme will be protecting 221 properties and noted the Local Levy request for this project still sits below the 15% Local Levy funding contribution limit.

Adrian Lythgo highlighted the recommendation from the Finance and Business Assurance Sub Group for is for the full RFCC to approve the additional £1 Million contribution.

Adrian Lythgo noted the good examples of Quick Win Funding, provided in the report, that have been used to good effect and he advised Members to have a look at these and to keep our foot down on delivery of these quick wins, highlighting they are good examples of how relatively small amounts of Local Levy funding have been used to very good effect. He also asked Members to note the RFCC Business Plan update provided in the paper.

### **Resolved:**

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

- noted the progress on delivering the 2022/23 capital programme
- noted the progress on delivering the 2022/23 resource maintenance programme
- noted the current/ future position of the Local Levy programme and latest spend forecast
- noted the GiA Allocation for 2023/24
- noted work across the Strategic Partnerships carried out using RFCC Quick Wins Funding (provided in the paper)
- noted the RFCC Business Plan Update (provided in the paper)

Local Levy:

- considered and approved the Local Levy request for £1 Million in 2023/24 for the Penketh and Whittle Flood Risk Management Scheme, in addition to the £250K of Local Levy funding previously approved. However, as the £1 Million of Local Levy funding is to be used mainly to underwrite the risk contingency part of the scheme, it has been approved with the understanding that should any of the risks not materialise then the funding will be released to the Local Levy programme.

Adrian Lythgo thanked Members for the discussion and there were no further comments or questions.

## **23 (20) Coastal Update**

Adrian Lythgo advised on 29 and 30 March the North West Coastal Conference took place, which focussed particularly on the impacts of climate change on the North West coast. He advised that post conference he wanted to provide a space for the full Committee to understand some of the key issues raised at the conference and have the opportunity to discuss some of the matters arising.

Suzana Ilic introduced Katie Eckford, who along with Samantha Godfrey organised and managed the event, held in Grange-Over-Sands, on behalf of the North West and North Wales Coastal Group. Katie thanked Adrian Lythgo for attending and opening the conference and thanked all those RFCC Members who were able to attend.

Members heard the Coastal Group wanted to bring together coastal practitioners to provide different perspectives on coastal management and to highlight the move towards nature based coastal solutions, innovative coastal research and how we can work together more effectively. The conference was sponsored by Volker Stevin and Balfour Beatty and over the two days it was attended by 123 people and 41 different organisations were represented including wildlife charities, Local Authorities, private companies and educational institutions. Exhibition stands were provided by a number of key organisations including the Morecambe Bay Partnership and 4 field trips to possible sites of nature-based solutions took place.

The Committee also noted all of the conference was recorded and talks can be shared with those who were unable to attend.

Suzana Ilic provided a number of key messages from each session of the conference, summary information from Carl Green and thanked Adrian Lythgo for his talk. Suzana's key messages included:

### **Climate challenges on the coast**

- Sea rise is accelerating and is difficult to reverse, this is happening not just because of ice melting but also with regard to thermo ocean expansion and the sea taking a long time to cool down if the temperatures drop.
- There are lots of uncertainties of coastal predictions - how do we engage with stakeholders, partners and the public to look at emissions?

Members heard in Scotland they have started to look at Shoreline Management Plans (SMPs) and have adopted an approach of where we are now and where we need to get to. Suzana advised this is probably an easier method to disseminate to the general public instead of using the epochs of 50 years and 100 years. They are also looking at doing dynamic adaptation pathways.

### **Working with Data**

- Excellent progress is being made with new technologies, lots of data is being collected and there are new developments involving the general public in data collection.
- More work needs to be done to effectively use data for short and long term planning. This will be the evidence for adaptation work for example.

Members were advised of a report from the Wales Coastal Monitoring Centre and were advised the dissemination of the general understanding of coastal systems is being provided on the Flood Hub.

### **Inspiration and the future**

- This session centered around nature-based solutions (NBS) and how we can provide coastal protection and other ecosystems services.
- There is a lack of quantitative and comparative assessment of NBS, which is generally not suitable for high energy coastlines.
- Innovation projects should address some of the gaps in the quantitative assessments of NBS.
- We need to be ambitious in addressing some of the other adaptation methods including planned retreat from the coast.

### **Changing mindsets**

- This resonated with many people, in moving the conversation from issue to action.
- Challenges in changing mindsets (perceptions, attitudes and beliefs) about coastal changes and adaptations, including political norms and institutional cultures.

### **Resourcing the future**

- Who should pay for all the adaptation measures?
- Is there sufficient resource capacity to deliver strategies/plans/solutions and work with communities?
- The need to work together in partnerships, coordinating resources to deliver.

Susana advised Members that everyone is keen to make coastal areas more resilient, however having so many partners involved sometimes can delay processes and conflicting information can come through and asked if it is time to introduce integrated coastal zone management, which would bring all partners together on the same page.

David Shaw advised he had found the conference to be a very enjoyable and intense couple of days, where a lot of information was provided by the 4 or 5 speakers presenting each of the sessions.

Members were advised there were a lot of parallels to what the Committee were previously discussing regarding complexities and partnerships, but there is a need to talk less about the climate emergency and more about the actions we are taking to overcome it. David advised there are lots of innovative actions taking place and partnerships working together in the North West and elsewhere and it is important that we learn from what's happening in other places. He noted coastal resilience work taking place in the east of England, where they have an interesting way of moving and sharing resources between the Local Authorities.

David advised there were many interesting and interested stakeholders present, many of whom knew each other, but there were many new faces too and he highlighted we need to ensure that current experience and expertise is passed to the next generation.

Councillor Alan Quinn commented on the next generation that will take on this work moving forwards and that many of the people with experience are leaving.



David Shaw recommended that people keep an eye out for the 2024 coastal conference dates and thanked Katie and Sam in making the conference run so smoothly.

Katie Eckford provided the results of the conference survey advising 98% had said the conference was useful. Attendees had also advised they had found the conference stimulating and had heard many new ideas. 94% advised it had been a good opportunity for networking, and 100% of attendees said the conference was well structured and organised. There was feedback which advised more time for networking would have been really useful, but overall the conference was well received.

Adrian Lythgo introduced Members to Len Harris, who previously attended a RFCC meeting to present an item on a survey of Local Authorities looking at the influence of coastal planning on local development planning. Members were advised Len is attending today's meeting to feed back on his work.

Len Harris advised the Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) is going through a refresh process at a national level and a key issue coming from this process is a question around the link between shoreline management planning, land use planning and marine planning and a sense that this link is not as strong as it could be.

Members heard each of the Coastal Groups around the country are looking at this issue, but not necessarily all in the same way. It was noted there are uncertainties within the Local Planning Authorities about how to use the SMP and key issues around the age of the document, produced in 2010, and whether the information contained within it could be relied upon. Also, as the SMP is not a statutory document, there was also questions about how much weight can be given to it, given that it is not a statutory requirement.

The Committee heard the SMP is not a single document and a series of guides have been produced to provide support for the SMP process, which step you through the SMP and the detail of the information behind it. A detailed report on the findings of this work has been produced, which includes 29 recommendations and a template for LAs to use to create their own SMP leaflet has been created.

Len highlighted some excellent work that has taken place in South Lakeland and Barrow in developing a guide for Westmorland and Furness Council and Cumberland Council.

Members were provided with the detail of the 10 guiding principles following a number of issues that have been raised.

Adrian Lythgo advised he wanted this item on the agenda to provide access to those people who were unable to attend the North West Coastal Conference, particularly with regard to the issue of joining up what happens on the coast with what happens inland and to have a very real narrative that's accessible across all the organizations involved on what is a burning platform around climate change.

Councillor Giles Archibald thanked Len for this work and for raising it today, advising this is a very important subject that we have probably passed some of the tipping points on that

mean we will have to live with the problem of higher sea levels. He commented that when looking at probabilities sea levels are due to rise much more dramatically than is being forecast. He questioned how much we are emphasizing to Government how serious this is, highlighting areas of the North West that will be endangered and asked if this is being addressed with enough urgency.

Councillor Jane Hugo referred to the five task groups that have been set up within Len's work and suggested that a sixth group could be set up to address climate change.

Councillor Hugo then highlighted a map that appeared in The Telegraph newspaper, that was developed by Climate Central, which detailed areas on the Fylde Coast which will be under water by 2030. She advised this information does not match the information being provided by the EA and as a consequence investors and developers for Blackpool Council are concerned and have written to Blackpool Council Directors about the risks and are questioning whether they should be investing in the area.

Suzana Ilic advised in Climate Central's newspaper article they had made some very simplistic predictions and didn't take into account measures that are currently in the public domain and the detail of how water is going to spread, and by doing this they have caused a lot of public anxiety and uncertainty. She highlighted this is very bad in terms of the wrong information being reported, but at the same time it has raised some issues and discussions.

Members noted the importance of how we communicate the right facts to the public and how we manage messaging around the climate change emergency. Suzana suggested the Government should provide funding so work can commence to provide evidence of future coastal flooding predictions and all consequences of some of the future decisions and how this can be dealt with.

Adrian Lythgo reflected that here we are dealing with something which is going to have an immense impact on some coastal communities. He advised there is no such thing as a simple truth and noted the consensus from the coastal conference was around having a shared narrative that we can all use. He noted the request for an additional workstream, which will detail who is pulling this shared narrative together so that we can all use it and agreed this is something the RFCC and the Coastal Group might want to reflect on, so we can clarify who needs to take the lead.

Suzana Ilic highlighted there are some areas of the coast which will move to 'managed realignment', and some that will stay at 'hold the line' for a longer period of time. She recognised the need to look at those areas which are going to move from hold the line to managed realignment, which means transferring from one state of being completely protected into something that it's not going to be completely protected. She advised conversations should be taking place with regard to how and when this is going to happen.

Adrian Lythgo advised this doesn't change the fact that whichever climate change scenario we look at, there's been immense investment in parts of our coast which for any developer will give them certainty for long enough. He advised there is a simple answer at one level

that these are 100-year epochs in terms of some of these impacts, but however we do need to have a straight story to tell.

David Shaw reflected there are multiple narratives to tell with regard to coastal management, but the same sort of narratives need to be told in relation to natural approaches to flood risk management. He advised what we need to face in the future is part of what the Committee needs to be thinking about more generally and not just specifically or exclusively in relation to the coast.

Adrian Lythgo thanked Suzana and the coastal team for the conference, advising the huge amount of energy at the conference and the keenness to turn what has been learnt into actions that will make a difference.

There were no further comments.

## **23 (21) Change to the date of the July 2023 RFCC meeting**

For business planning and attendance reasons Adrian Lythgo advised there is a requirement to change the date of the next RFCC meeting from 14 July to 21 July. As a consequence, this will also involve a change to the date of the RFCC Finance and Business Assurance Sub group Meeting from 30 June to 7 July. Adrian noted that Rachel Harmer has recently sent Members an email with the detail of these anticipated changes.

Councillor Alan Quinn advised there could be a clash of dates with a Greater Manchester Combined Authority meeting and Carolyn Otley noted the new dates fall within the school holiday period.

There were no objections to the change of meeting dates and Adrian advised Rachel Harmer will be in contact with Members outside of the meeting in order to see what attendance will look like on the newly advised RFCC meeting date.

Members approved the change of date for the next RFCC meeting from 14 July to 21 July.

## **23 (22) Any Other Business**

No items of any other business had been received in advance of the meeting.

There were no further items of business raised.

Adrian thanked Members for attending and for their contributions and closed the meeting.