

**North West Regional Flood and Coastal Committee**  
**Minutes of the meeting held on Friday, 26 April 2024 via MS Teams**

**Attendees:**

**Members**

Adrian Lythgo (Chairman)  
Councillor Denise Rollo (Cumbria Strategic Flood Risk Partnership)  
Councillor Stephen Clarke (Lancashire Strategic Flood Risk Partnership)  
Councillor James Shorrock (Lancashire Strategic Flood Risk Partnership)  
Councillor Richard Silvester (Greater Manchester Strategic Flood Risk Partnership)  
Councillor Tricia Ayrton (Greater Manchester Strategic Flood Risk Partnership)  
Councillor Karen Shore (Cheshire Mid Mersey Strategic Flood Risk Partnership)  
Councillor Nick Mannion (Cheshire Mid Mersey Strategic Flood Risk Partnership)  
Councillor Elizabeth Grey (Merseyside Strategic Flood Risk Partnership)  
Councillor Ian Moncur (Merseyside Strategic Flood Risk Partnership)  
David Shaw (EA Appointed Member – Planning and Design)  
Chris Findley (EA Appointed Member – Development and Sustainable Investment)  
Carolyn Otley (EA Appointed Member – Communities)  
Susannah Bleakley (EA Appointed Member – Coastal)  
Kate Morley (EA Appointed Member – Conservation)  
Neville Elstone (EA Appointed Member – General Business and Assurance)  
Perry Hobbs (EA Appointed Member – Water Industry) – part attendance  
Paul Barnes (EA Appointed Member – Agriculture)

**Environment Agency Officers Present**

Ian Crewe, Area Director, Greater Manchester Merseyside and Cheshire (GMMC)  
Carol Holt, Area Director, Cumbria and Lancashire Area (C&L) - part attendance  
Richard Knight, Area Flood Risk Manager, Cumbria (C&L)  
Fiona Duke, Area Flood Risk Manager, Lancashire (C&L)  
Nick Pearson, Area Flood Risk Manager (GMMC)  
Ollie Hope, Area Flood Risk Manager (GMMC)  
Martin Sibbit, Area FCRM PSO Team Leader (GMMC)  
Sally Whiting, Senior FCRM Advisor (GMMC)  
Crystal Orton, RFCC Project Manager (GMMC)  
Rachel Harmer, RFCC Secretariat (GMMC)  
Sarah Fontana, FCRM Capital Programme Co-ordinator (GMMC)  
Andy Tester, FCRM Programming Manager (GMMC)  
Gary Hilton, FCRM Local Authority Capital Projects Advisor (GMMC)  
Debra Glover, FCRM Local Authority Capital Projects Advisor (GMMC)  
Mia Mullender, FCRM Local Authority Capital Projects Advisor (C&L)  
Rachael Broadhurst, FCRM Local Authority Capital Projects Advisor (GMMC)  
Ayush Sheth, FCRM Programming Advisor (GMMC)  
Chris Scott, FCRM Advisor (GMMC)

**Local Authority Officers and observers:**

Nick Rae, Westmorland and Furness Council  
Jason Harte, Westmorland and Furness Council  
Pieter Barnard, Cumberland Council  
Andrew Harrison, Cumberland Council  
Alison Harker, Cumbria Strategic Flood Risk Partnership  
Councillor Jane Hugo, Lancashire Strategic Flood Partnership  
Clare Nolan-Barnes, Blackpool Council  
Rachel Crompton, Lancashire County Council  
Lorah Cheyne, Lancashire Strategic Flood Risk Partnership  
Sarah Wardle, Merseyside Strategic Flood Risk Partnership  
Paul Wisse, Sefton Council  
David Boyer, Warrington Borough Council  
Matt Winnard, Cheshire Mid Mersey Strategic Flood Risk Partnership  
Fran Comyn, Rochdale Borough Council  
Imran Munshi, Blackburn with Darwen Council  
Bea Beggs, Our Future Coast Programme Manager, Wyre Borough Council  
Katie Eckford, Shoreline Management Plan Co-ordinator / Coastal Group Secretariat

**Observers:**

Tom De la Rosa, EA Senior FCRM Advisor, Adaptation and Resilience  
Sharma Jencitis, United Utilities (UU)  
David Kennedy, EA Senior FCRM Advisor (C&L)  
Guy Metcalfe, Cheshire East Council  
Ellie Rigby, Cheshire East Council  
Junaid Bawany, Defra Finance Projects Team Review  
William Morris, Chair of the Sunderland Point Community Association  
Graham Harrison, Member of the public

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

Adrian Lythgo opened the meeting and gave everyone a warm welcome.

Adrian advised apologies for the meeting had been received from Councillor Daniel Barrington (Merseyside Strategic Flood Risk Partnership); Councillor Philip Cusack (Greater Manchester Strategic Flood Risk Partnership); Carl Green (Chair of the North West and North Wales Coastal Group); and Stewart Davies (EA Board Member).

Members noted Councillor Elizabeth Grey will be joining the meeting a little later.

Adrian welcomed the following speakers: Tom De La Rosa, EA Senior FCRM Advisor, Adaptation and Resilience, here to present item 5 – National FCRIP Programme Overview; Dave Kennedy (EA) and Jason Harte (Westmorland and Furness Council) presenting item 6 (CiFR) alongside Carolyn Otley, RFCC Member – Communities; Bea Beggs, from Wyre Borough Council and Manager of Our Future Coast Programme,

presenting item 7, Our Future Coast, alongside Susannah Bleakley, RFCC Member – Coastal Issues; and Chris Scott (EA) presenting the NAFRA2 Update.

Chris Wolstenholme (Chair of the Sefton Seafront Residents Action Group), William Morris (Chair of the Sunderland Point Community Association), Graham Harrison (Member of the public) and Junaid Bawany (Defra Finance Projects Review Team) were all welcomed as meeting observers.

Adrian referred Members to his quarterly Chair's Update paper, shared with Members on 2 April, and highlighted the steps that we as a Committee can take to try and influence policy and noted the content provides relevant context for a number of items in today's agenda.

Members heard that due to time constraints Adrian completed a personal response to the IDB (Individual Drainage Board) Regulations Review, stating that this represents his views rather than those of the Committee.

Members were reminded of the success of 8 North West projects successfully securing new national Natural Flood Management (NFM) funding (of 25 projects nationally), which were touched upon at the last Finance and Business Assurance Sub-group meeting. Adrian advised that the Committee will follow their implementation with interest.

No Declarations of Interest have been received.

## **24 (12) Minutes of the RFCC Meeting held on 19 January 2024 and actions and matters arising**

The Committee were advised the draft minutes of the 19 January meeting need to be slightly amended to reflect the attendance of Councillor Tony Brennan and Anthony Morley. With these amendments Adrian Lythgo asked if there are any further comments on the draft minutes.

Councillor Stephen Clarke raised the request made at the last meeting for the cost benefit information on the Billington and River Irwell at Kearsley Schemes'. Adrian advised it was his understanding this information was to be provided this week and Rachel Harmer advised there may be a slight delay in the information being sent out due to staff leave.

Councillor Stephen Clarke proposed and Councillor Nick Mannion seconded the minutes. The minutes of the 19 January 2024 RFCC meeting were approved by the Committee.

On matters arising Members received confirmation that:

1, The performance metrics being used by the Flood Poverty and Resilient Roch projects have been shared with RFCC Members.

2, The cost benefit ratio information on the Billington and River Irwell Schemes' will be sent out imminently.

3, Letters of thanks have been sent to former RFCC members Suzana Ilic and David Harpley.

There were no further comments or questions.

## **24 (13) Recent Flooding Incidents**

Adrian Lythgo referred Members to the report provided on flooding in the last quarter, noting that it has again been a very wet quarter with a number of named storms but there have been relatively few properties flooded internally. He summarised that there have been 26 properties flooded across the five sub-regional partnerships. The North West has been relatively lucky compared to other parts of the country in this regard. While the number of properties flooded is relatively small, he reflected that each property flooded still has a very big impact.

Adrian recognised how busy risk management authorities have been during this period including operational teams operating assets which have been very much in use. Coastal areas have also been impacted with high winds coinciding with a number of high tides.

Adrian provided Members with the opportunity to comment on any flooding in their areas, or nationally. Councillor Stephen Clarke commented that even with the high tides and winds the flood defences at Fleetwood have worked superbly.

Members noted the position in terms of flood incidents for the last quarter.

## **24 (14) FCRM Successes 2023/24**

For this item, Members received an overview of FCRM successes around the North West during 2023/24 from a variety of presenters. Adrian commented that it is worthwhile reflecting achievements and completions of different flood resilience interventions, to show the breadth of the work that the RFCC and its RMAs are involved in.

Cumbria:

Richard Knight provided an overview of progress on the Kendal Flood Risk Management Scheme, advising that back in 2015 some 2000 properties were flooded in Kendal and surrounding villages. He advised the scheme is progressing well with 50% of the reaches in Kendal town centre complete and the installing of glass panels has begun. Members were advised there have been great successes with media coverage, work with local Councillors and local flood action groups.

Andrew Harrison (now Cumberland Council) spoke on the Flimby scheme where in 2015 over 100 homes were affected by flooding. Members noted five watercourses come together at Flimby and the huge amount of work that has taken place to reduce the risk of flooding, including the installation of circa 75 leaky dams in Flimby Great Wood just above the village.

Andrew also reported back on the Holme village project to address surface water and groundwater issues, where circa 10 properties have flooded previously. Andrew provided an overview of the complexities of the scheme, which has taken approximately two years to complete.

Members noted Papcastle and South Street in Cockermouth as examples of Quick Win projects completed.

Cheshire Mid Mersey:

Ollie Hope spoke about the multi-agency emergency plan which has been agreed and implemented to support the effective functioning of the £7 Million Northwich Flood Risk Management Scheme, completed in 2017 to protect circa 400 properties from flooding. This collaboration between the EA, United Utilities (UU) and Cheshire West and Chester Council which was successfully implemented in 2023, now provides a much enhanced joint incident response capability for the community. The three parties have all jointly committed to fund an integrated catchment model for the town and will continue to work together on a long-term sustainable plan.

Warrington's EA-led Penketh and Whittle Flood Risk Management Scheme has benefitted from £1.25 Million of Local Levy support to help with scheme delivery, which will protect 221 properties along the Penketh and Whittle Brooks. Extensive habitat development is also incorporated into the scheme, situated next to the Trans Pennine Trail.

Lancashire:

Richard Knight provided a brief overview of the £55 Million Preston and South Ribble Flood Risk Management Scheme, providing enhanced flood protection to over 5000 homes and businesses. During the last quarter over 500 metres of flood wall has been completed and more recently the project has handed the Broadgate Gardens element back to Preston City Council marked by a ceremony.

Clare Nolan-Barnes provided an overview of two Quick Win projects installing sustainable drainage including rain gardens within the public realm. A Stanley Park building now has a sedum roof and a rain system installed, which feeds into a lavender bed enabling rainwater to bypass the drainage system; and as part of a partnership project with UU at Fishers Field, SuDS features including rain beds are taking water from a changing room block.

Merseyside:

Ollie Hope provided an overview of the award-winning £20 Million West Kirby Flood Risk Management Scheme, delivered with a combination of funding from Grant-in-Aid, Local Levy and a significant contribution from Wirral Council. Members heard since completion the scheme has been called into action twice, notably in the last couple of months and in particular in the storm event on the 9 April.

Back in 2013 a storm flooded 12 properties, caused external damage to many properties and huge damage to the promenade. In the most recent event, one property was reported as flooded. In the longer term, accounting for sea level rise predictions, circa 500 properties will benefit from reduced risk.

Paul Wisse highlighted a couple of project successes led by Sefton Council. Sefton is the lead authority for the North West Coastal Monitoring Programme, which is part of a national network of coastal monitoring programmes that cover the coast of England and Wales. The programme is collecting data on coastal change and condition to support coastal management actions and delivery of actions within the Shoreline Management Plan (SMP). Any coastal protection scheme will use this data to inform its design and delivery, and the monitoring programme has supported over £200 Million of investment in the North West since it began in 2011.

Secondly, in 2018, Sefton Council took the opportunity to update their surface water flood risk maps following the new climate change projections. They were able to combine funding from GiA and Defra's Boosting Action for Surface Water to get the whole borough model updated, which can be fed into the EA National surface water flood maps that are publicly available on the website. Paul advised these projects have identified key hotspot areas and a number of interventions are being recommended, some of which have fed into the Alt Catchment NFM Project.

Greater Manchester:

Nick Pearson highlighted the Horwich Town Centre Scheme led by Bolton Council looking at a combination of flood sources. An integrated model produced early on captured the flooding risk in a single model which provided an accurate understanding of the flood mechanisms. The scheme included improvements to highway drainage and new green space areas in the town. Members acknowledged the large amount of internal and external partnership working that took place throughout the project, which was nominated for an ICE (Institute of Civil Engineers) award.

Nick also provided an overview of the EA-led Rochdale and Littleborough Flood Alleviation Scheme, which has now been divided into two business cases. Littleborough is the first phase of the project, which has been divided into two phases, the first of which will deliver a reduced flood risk to over 300 properties.

A number of Greater Manchester Quick Win projects were highlighted, including Lavington Avenue in Cheadle, Howard Street SuDs-enabled tree pits in Salford, and the incorporation of multiple small projects within the Oldham Town Centre regeneration plan.

Adrian Lythgo said he hoped that Members had found it useful to hear about successes across the region. Considerable work and effort has gone into each one to address some of the barriers and blockages to projects and schemes. Once a year it's very worthwhile looking in broad terms at what we've collectively delivered, from big to very small projects.

Adrian briefly referred to some successes and completed projects within the RFCC Business Plan including the Flood Hub website and the Unpave the Way Project which recently featured at the RHS Urban Show in Manchester and is to feature at the RHS Tatton Show in July. This project encourages people to have natural front gardens rather than hard surfaces. Adrian advised that Sally Whiting would provide more detail on the Business Plan later in the meeting.

Adrian Lythgo thanked all for their information. There were no further comments or questions.

## **24 (15) Flood and Coastal Risk Innovation Programme (FCRIP) National Programme Overview**

Adrian Lythgo welcomed Tom De La Rosa (National EA Programme Manager), who provided Members with an overview of the innovation programmes taking place nationally, including:

- Adaptation Pathways Programme, which is supporting 5 strategic locations in England to develop long-term investment plans for climate adaptation
- Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme, which is testing and developing new ways to support communities at significant risk of coastal erosion.
- Flood and Coastal Resilience Innovation Programme (FCRIP), which is testing and developing new ways to support communities at flood and coastal erosion risk to transition and adapt to climate change.

The North West has three of the FCRIP projects including the Resilient Roch Project in Rochdale, CiFR (Cumbria Innovative Flood Resilience Project) and Our Future Coast.

The FCRIP programme projects are well underway and Members noted the involvement of circa 400+ partners nationally, including stakeholders, academics, industry bodies and the private sector. Currently these projects are funded until 2027.

Tom provided further insight into the Adaptive Pathways Programme, Community Partnerships and Governance, Growth and Finance, and Monitoring and Technology.

He finished by highlighting the emerging resources and tools being generated from these national programmes.

Adrian thanked Tom for his presentation and acknowledged the breadth of the different sorts of projects. He asked in terms of taking the learning forward if there is a broad approach that can be shared for how some of the innovation will be mainstreamed including what this means for guidance around the strategy implementation.

Tom advised the Coastal Handbook will be the repository for coastal guidance and learning and an exercise of mapping out all project activities within this work programme has been done.

Members heard there is currently no single Resilience and Adaptation Strategy.

Rachel Crompton asked if the National Team can provide guidance to Local Authorities (LAs) to help adapt their approaches to groundwater flood risk and Tom advised this is available along with methodologies and case studies which may be useful to look at.

Paul Barnes advised it is interesting that groundwater can be affected by using NFM, and advised there also needs to be an examination of soil biology, so we can have a thorough understanding of it.

Adrian thanked Tom for his presentation. There were no further comments or questions.

## **24 (16) Cumbria Innovative Flood Resilience Programme (CiFR)**

Jason Harte opened this presentation on the Cumbria Innovative Flood Resilience (CiFR) Project, hosted by Westmorland and Furness Council and covering all of Cumbria.

Carolyn Otley (RFCC Member) provided an overview of the six-year CiFR project, reflecting the stage they are at, involving developing the project and getting business cases through the system.

CiFR's is seeking to improve the overall flood and climate resilience of small rural communities that have suffered repeated flooding or that we know are at increasing flood risk. Work is being done building on existing partnerships and also trying to combine the existing strengths in Cumbria around NFM and evidence gathering, which is needed to achieve changes in policy and practice to make a lasting difference.

Dave Kennedy spoke about the challenges which have led to this project, including:

- Traditional hard flood defences being expensive and not financially viable for small communities.



- NFM has the potential to significantly reduce flood risk if done in a targeted way, but is hard to fund via existing routes.
- Funding packages need to be attractive to farmers and landowners as targeted NFM work is often on prime agricultural land.

Members received an overview of different approaches being taken:

- Modelling and monitoring work is being done in partnership with the hydrology team based at Lancaster University, led by Nick Chappell, where scientific led evidence will be gathered.
- Farming and Community Officers, in essence two Countryside Stewardship Advisers, paid for by the project, employed and managed through the Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) initiative within Natural England with guidance from the project are helping to clarify where to target our focus. Dave advised the CSF involvement is critical as this provides a trusted intermediary to engage with the farmers.
- Blended finance is also being looked at, with a view to adding in funding from the farming community, private sector and potentially United Utilities.
- Building community resilience e.g. providing emergency services connections, running exercises to prepare for emergencies, running classes for school children.

A separate piece of work will be being done in conjunction with Manchester Business College to establish a financial value on societal resilience.

David advised on the locations across which a mixture of NFM and community resilience work is taking place, including Grasmere, Stockdalewath, Warcop and Crummock/Tom Rudd Beck and Bitter Beck, Kendal, Carlisle, Appleby, Cockermouth and Keswick.

Carolyn provided further details of the NFM and community engagement taking place in Grasmere, and an overview of what has changed during the first three years of the project, These include:

- Communities are increasingly wanting to talk about climate change and the impacts of it.
- Water quality has become an increasing topic of conversation and there is increased awareness of the improved water quality benefits of NFM measures in addition to reducing flood risk.
- Emerging payment rates within the Environmental Land Management Scheme are making it more attractive to farmers and landowners to use their land to store water.
- The National Resilience Framework has increased the focus on 'whole of society resilience'.

An interim review now is capturing learning from the first half of the project to inform the next three years.

David Shaw gave his thanks for the presentation and advised that he has been thinking about innovation and entrepreneurialism in terms of delivery, noting that some thought should be given to this. He also suggested linking with the Cumbria Community Forest.

Ian Crewe thanked Carolyn and David for their presentation, reflecting on his recent visit to Ullswater to see the work of the Cumbrian River Restoration Programme, which is similar in nature to this project. He remarked on EA farm visits taking place across the North West to discuss water quality on the farms and conveyed the feedback from farmers that they have found these visits very supportive. He remarked that he hopes there is an opportunity to continue this engagement with farmers to develop trust and encourage better collaboration with the farming community.

Adrian Lythgo thanked Jason, Carolyn and Dave for their presentation, which provided some real illustrations of what is underneath some of the headlines provided by Tom. There were no further comments or questions.

## **24 (17) 'Our Future Coast' Project**

Bea Beggs (Project Manager) provided Members with a project overview, including objectives and scope, progress, learning to date and what the project is hoping to achieve in the future.

Members heard a pre-recorded presentation from Carl Green, as he had been unable to attend the meeting, reflecting the need for solutions to be built on the knowledge and understanding of those who have real stakes in the outcomes. He shared the ambition for solutions to have a low carbon value, to enhance biodiversity, as well as helping to adapt to the changing climate. Coastal communities and landowners are at the cutting edge of the climate challenge and a sustainable future cannot be realised by the hardening of coastlines - we must embrace the multiple benefits and adaptability of nature based solutions. Through an understanding of natural processes with communities at their heart, within the framework of the Shoreline Management Plan (SMP), we must embrace a hybrid approach. Enabling this to happen is a long-term aim of Our Future Coast.

Carl introduced the 14 demonstration sites along the North West coast which will help to identify obstacles and barriers to implementation of nature based solutions and will help to develop a knowledge base across nine local authorities, environmental charities, landowners, statutory bodies, universities and communities.

Project challenges include resistance to change and new ways of working, constraints on skilled resources (including for the Project Manager role), and a low degree of readiness in terms of prior engagement with communities and stakeholders.

Progress highlights include;

- 4 sites set to complete by 2027
- An additional 4 sites with possibilities of delivery are being worked through.
- 2 learning sites will influence the methodology and objectives of the other OFC sites
- 3 further sites are developing and will form a legacy pipeline.
- Working with CoastSense Radar 8 deployments, which is looking at their artificial intelligence salt marsh assessments.
- Engagement processes have been tested and are live across all sites.

Susannah Bleakley advised she has been the community engagement lead on this programme and over the past two years has been working closely with site leads and with others to tailor engagement, choose the right approaches for the objectives and the context of the site. Members noted that for managed realignment sites, it has been about opening detailed discussions with landowners, leading into working with them to explore alternative finance. For other sites, for example a recreational beach, one of the first things has been to look at the community understanding and readiness, their understanding of climate change, and what that means for the site.

Community meetings and drop-in sessions have been organised for each of the projects and in total so far there have been 62 events involving 2,000 people. Members noted the engagement priorities for the projects and key learning from engagement and the need to start conversations as early as possible.

The next steps for the project were shared with Members, which include:

- Continuing to work with stakeholders to co-design, co-plan, and where possible, co-deliver
- To finalise delivery sites – complete option scoping and begin capital works
- Develop a series of project plans to form a legacy pipeline
- Monitoring review to explore gaps in learning
- Continue to partner with CoastSense including on the Saltmarsh Artificial Intelligence project
- Research with the University of Lancaster on adaptation pathways for bridging the gap between the SMP and the community experience.
- FCRIP projects working jointly on policy change.

Adrian Lythgo thanked Bea and Susannah for their presentation. He asked Members to think through the information provided on engagement so this can be picked up as we look towards refreshing the Business Plan.

There were no further comments or questions.

## **24 (18) Report from the RFCC Finance & Business Assurance Sub-Group**

Adrian introduced the Finance and Business Assurance Sub-Group and their role for new Members and observers, including their making of recommendations to the full Committee.

Neville Elstone reflected on the significant engagement observed at the last Sub Group meeting and thanked Members of the Sub-group for the excellent meeting which had good debate.

### **Capital and Resource Maintenance Programme 2023/24**

Andy Tester (EA Programme Manager) provided the national investment programme context and encouraged reflection on what has already been achieved over the last few years.

The Committee heard forecast figures at the end of January 2024 indicate the North West will better protect 3383 properties from flooding this year, which is about 10% of the national programme, of which 2930 properties are now better protected. Since January the forecast (3462) properties better protected has reduced by 79 properties largely due to scheme delays pushing their completion into future years. Andy gave the example of the Penketh and Whittle Scheme had a target of 221 properties better protected, which will now be formally reported in 2024/25. Members noted our forecast is below our national set target, which is partly due to the nationally estimated 20% uplift to capture non-residential properties not reflecting reality in some cases.

Spend forecasts at mid-February showed the North West is expecting to draw down £98.5 Million this year, which is £10.7 Million less than allocated and £8.7 Million less than forecasts reported at the January meeting. This is due to several projects being deferred and examples were provided, supported by details in the report.

The Committee noted at the end of January actual spend was 77% of the full year forecast. EA schemes had spent 79% of their forecast with £17.2 Million left to spend. LA schemes had claimed 71% of their forecast with £4.9 Million still to claim in 2023/24. The figure from the end of January 2024 indicated £22.2 Million was still to be claimed in the last month of the 2023/24 year. Updated figures to the end of the financial year are still being processed and will be available at the July 2024 meeting.

With regard to efficiencies, up to Quarter 3, claims have been accepted with a total value of £6.382 Million from 15 projects. Members noted the North West are forecasting to achieve 7% of efficiencies against a target of 10% for 2023/24.

Andy highlighted the challenges that had been present during 2023/24, including nine named storm events between September 2023 and January 2024, which impacted teams causing disruption to delivery of the capital programme. Members noted adverse weather conditions during the winter months have caused delayed delivery of all work programmes, and resourcing across all Risk Management Authorities (RMAs) continues to be a challenge.

### **EA Resource (Resource and Maintenance) Programme 2023/24**

Members noted the current funding allocation of £22.415 Million, which is an increase from £21.056 Million reported at the January meeting. The main reason for this

increase is the £1.36 Million North West share of the £25 Million additional funding nationally being transferred to resource funding. The £5 Million overspend is approved nationally by the EA and remains in the same position as it was at the end of February. Both EA areas are on track to complete their maintenance programmes for 2023/24.

### **Funding allocation for 2024/25 (FCERM Grant-in-Aid)**

The allocation of £98.6 Million capital funding allocation for the North West has now been confirmed and approved by the EA Board. This figure is for capital maintenance of assets, new defences and property level resilience schemes. It also includes the enabling and support programme including Asset Reconditioning. There is also an additional capital allocation detailed in the paper for an EA-led scheme in Cleator, Cumbria.

Andy reported that the resource asset maintenance allocation for 2024/25 has not yet been confirmed but the indicative allocation is £12.1 Million which while an increase of £300k from last year, is a real terms decrease due to the decline in asset condition and the increase in the amount and severity of storms having an impact on some assets.

Andy advised we are now entering the annual programme refresh period. This year it will be slightly different in that it will cover both of the last two years of the programme, instead of just the programme for the following year. National guidance for this is currently being written.

With regard to risks to delivery, Members heard we are continuing to see partnership funding gaps increase across many schemes which may delay progress or stop schemes altogether. To try to mitigate this a North West Partnership Funding Sub-Group has been established in the EA to assess, review and identify funding and assess the viability of schemes. Andy advised the Secretary of State has also agreed criteria to use some of the existing national funding settlement to offset partnership funding pressures and an update on this will be provided at a future meeting.

Members also noted the transition to new supplier frameworks may have an impact on delivery in the first two quarters of 2024/25, and that resources continue to be stretched.

In September 2023 the EA and Defra announced £25 Million funding for improving flood resilience through a new Natural Flood Management (NFM) Programme, which is being managed by the EA. This NFM programme will help meet the aims of the Government's policy statement on flooding and coastal erosion, the National FCERM Strategy, and Government's Environmental Improvement Plan, and will build on and apply what we learnt from the £15 Million NFM pilot programme (2017 – 2021). We heard the Government has committed to double the number of government-funded projects that include nature-based solutions to reduce flooding and coastal erosion risk. The target is

for 260 NFM projects between 2021 and 2027 and the NFM Programme will help to achieve this target.

The Committee noted the North West has been successful in obtaining additional NFM funding through this programme and of the 40 successful projects nationally, 13 are in the North West. These are:

- Cheshire Wildlife Trust: Meols NFM scheme
- City of Trees Trust: Crompton Moor Slow the Flow Leaky Dams
- Community Forest Trust: Whitewell Brook NFM
- Mersey Rivers Trust: Alt catchment NFM
- National Trust: Poynton and Micker (Norbury) catchment plan (Headwaters)
- Ribble Catchment Conservation Trust Ltd.: Ribble Revival: Darwen community catchment
- Ribble Catchment Conservation Trust Ltd.: Ribble Revival: Wrea Green community catchment
- Ribble Catchment Conservation Trust Ltd.: Ribble Revival: Clitheroe community catchment
- Woodland Trust: Smithills Estate NFM 2024
- Wyre River Trust: Wyre Catchment resilience programme
- Brampton 2 Zero CiC, Brampton Natural Flood Management Project
- National Trust, Common Farm Hydrological Restoration
- National Trust, Resilient Coledale

### **Local Levy Programme Update**

Andy reported that the balance at the start of the 2023/24 year was £12.216 Million, which includes interest earned on balances at the end of 2022/23 (of £216k). Income for 2023/24 was £4.412 Million and therefore the total available balance was £16.628 Million.

Current forecasts indicate we will draw down £6.4 Million, which is £1.8 Million less than allocated. This is due to a number of scheme forecast changes including Lindale Road, Grange over Sands (£270k) - due to delayed delivery; Irwell Vale to Chadderton (£101k) - project not progressing due to funding gap; and Sankey Brook (£115k) – rescheduled to the next CSR (Capital Spending Review) period. Final outturn figures will be advised at the July meeting.

Members noted for 2024/25 the North West will start the financial year with a total available resource of £15.3 Million (£4.544 Million in income, a forecast balance of £10.236 Million carried forward, and £0.52 Million estimated interest on balances at the end of 2023/24). The current spend forecast for 2024/25 is £9.849 Million, which includes the requests for Local Levy to be discussed further on today's meeting agenda. The North West RFCC is forecast to have a balance of £5.451 Million at the end of 2024/25.

## Local Levy Requests for Funding

Following discussion and consideration at the Finance and Business Assurance Sub Group, Andy Tester provided Members with brief overviews of two projects led by Cheshire East which are requesting Local Levy funding.

- Lindow Community Primary School, Wilmslow (Cheshire East) - £30k
- Ryles Pool Ordinary Watercourse Improvement Works (Cheshire East) - £120k

On the latter request, Members noted the total scheme cost is £175k. Cheshire East Council have already spent £150k and is able to contribute another £10-15k. They are expecting to secure £45k GiA funding. Therefore the Local Levy ask is £120k. Andy acknowledged that this is a relatively large proportion of the total cost, but that this is a complex issue with assets under multiple riparian ownership and there are considerable local benefits including health and safety. Members also noted further discussions with property owners regarding their responsibilities as riparian owners of the culvert will also take place.

Members noted the Finance and Business Assurance Sub-group's recommendation to approve both funding requests and there were no questions or comments raised.

The Committee noted there had been a discussion at the Finance and Business Assurance Sub-group meeting regarding a Local Levy request for the Preston and South Ribble Scheme and there was an agreement for this to be deferred until the July meeting to allow time for the Lancashire Partnership Councillors to receive a more in-depth briefing on the scheme.

## **RFCC Business Plan Update**

Sally Whiting provided Members with highlights from the report, following the more in-depth presentation at the recent RFCC Finance and Business Assurance Sub-group Meeting.

Members were advised 25 projects have been part of the Business Plan since the beginning and the majority of these are ongoing. Thirteen of those are in a good place, three are progressing a little slower than intended and there are two which are not currently progressing and one of these we are proposing to formally close down. Three projects are complete and four have already been closed down or merged into other projects.

The investment for 2023/24 was circa £1.4 Million. The final outturn figures are still awaited however the final forecast is just under £1.1 Million, which is an underspend of

around £340k, partly due to provision of budget which wasn't required such as the RMA Capacity Building Programme. This is good news as national training courses and budget have been tapped into, not requiring Local Levy funding.

Members noted in January 2024 they approved £1.2 Million for 2024/25 Business Plan work and the indicative Local Levy funding requirement of £1 Million for 2025/26.

Sally highlighted a number of successes coming from the Business Plan including:

- The Flood Hub website, which continues to grow year on year with significant increases in users and page views. There are dedicated resources working on the site developing content and social media campaigns
- Knowledge development and sharing projects – linking to both the Greater Manchester Integrated Water Management Plan and the Flood Poverty Report.
- The Front Garden's Project and the securing of Leon Davis, a multi-gold RHS best in show garden designer to work with the project team to exhibit the sustainable garden project at the RHS Urban Show in Manchester and then the RHS Tatton Show in July.

Members then received the following proposed amendments to the Business Plan programme, the background and justification for which are set out in the paper and had been discussed at the Sub-group meeting.

- **ID3 – Wider benefits of FCRM schemes** – project close-down
- **ID12 – Front Gardens Project** – budget flexibility request of up to £10K

Members were reminded the Terms of Reference for the Finance and Business Assurance Sub-group provide delegated authority from the RFCC to approve changes to allocations on Business Plan projects with previously approved allocation that are within 10%. In this case the potential increase of £10k represents around 7% of the RFCC's investment and therefore the RFCC were asked to note the approval for the budget flexibility request provided by the Sub Group.

- **NFM Pipeline Development for Cumbria** - £150K Local Levy contribution

### **Partnership Co-ordinator Review**

Given that this review and a previous proposal has already been discussed by the Sub group at a previous meeting, and the revised proposal had been shared with the partnerships in advance of the Sub Group meeting, Neville Elstone simply highlighted the funding proposal to provide:

- £37K per partnership per year (up from £30k per year) for three years to March 2027.
- £5K additional sum to support partnership operating costs.



This amounts to an increase in RFCC contribution of £60K per year and Members noted the recommendation from the F&BASG to approve this increase this additional funding.

There were no further questions or comments.

**Resolved:**

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

- Noted the progress delivering the 2023/24 capital and resource maintenance programmes.
- Noted the current Local Levy position and latest spend forecast.
- Noted the approved capital and maintenance resource allocations for 2024/25 and the associated targets. (Recommendation in national allocation paper)
- Noted the updated capital allocations. (Recommendation in national allocation paper)
- Continued to support the EA and other RMAs in the delivery of the final 3 years of the current capital investment programme. (Recommendation in national allocation paper)
- **Approved** the request of £30k Local Levy funding for the Lindow Community Primary School Flood Alleviation Scheme.
- **Approved** the request of £120k Local Levy Funding for the Ryles Pool Ordinary Watercourse Improvement Works.
- RFCC Business Plan Update
  - **Approved** the closure of the ID3 – Wider Benefits of FCRM Schemes project.
  - Noted the RFCC F&BASG’s approval of the ID12 – Front Garden’s Project budget flexibility request for up to £10k of Local Levy.
  - **Approved** the £150k of Local Levy funding for the NFM Pipeline Development (Cumbria) Project.
  - **Approved** the RFCC’s revised contribution for the Partnership Co-ordinator Contribution - £42K per partnership per year, fixed for the next three years from 2024/25 to 2026/27 (£37k for the partnership role and £5k of partnership support costs).

**24 (19) RFCC Local Levy Strategy**

Members heard the draft Local Levy Strategy, which sets out our high-level principles and guidelines with respect to allocation of Local Levy funding, has been to the Committee on a couple of occasions with proposed changes to its content and Sally Whiting presented the draft final version of the Strategy for approval.

In the future more details on how to request Local Levy and how the fund will be managed will be provided as part of the new RFCC Sharepoint site information.

Members were asked to show their support of the draft final Local Levy Strategy, which was subsequently approved.

**Resolved:** The RFCC approved and supported the adoption of the final draft Local Levy Strategy.

## **24 (20) United Utilities Update**

Perry Hobbs had to leave the meeting early and the UU update was deferred to the July 2024 meeting.

## **24 (21) NAFRA2 Update**

Ollie Hope introduced this NAFRA2 overview which intends to establish a base level of understand for Members of what it will deliver. Further information will then be provided over RFCC meetings in July, October and January. Members were advised to email Rachel Harmer if they have any questions following the meeting.

Chris Scott advised from 2024 the EA will produce a new national assessment of flood risk (NAFRA2) that will help places better plan and adapt to future risks from flooding from river, the sea and surface water. Members heard the national flood risk assessment will enable us and others to make risk-based decisions, to understand where the key risks are in terms of flooding and be able to action any potential projects moving forwards. It will also allow us to understand what the impacts of our defences are, for example, so we can then understand the damages avoided and what the main economic benefit of investment might be.

Members heard the current NAFRA assesses the present-day flood risk from river and the sea, but doesn't include climate change, or risks that are in place by defences that have been put in place. NAFRA2 products will:

- Meet the FCERM Strategy Objective
- Provide updated Flood Zones for Flood Maps
- Be enhanced to include additional information such as climate change and flood depths

And from April 2025 the NAFRA2 system will:

- Support quarterly updates to published products
- Allow users to interact with data and a wide range of bespoke outputs
- Include additional functionality

NAFRA2 will be a single source for all flood risk data across every region of the country and improvements to our NAFRA information will provide:

- greater consistency
- a greater range of information, i.e. depths and velocities, climate change scenarios and greater assessment of impacts
- greater accuracy and precision

- greater flexibility and efficiency

Local Authorities have been given access to view the new web portal and there is still time for LAs to review and provide comments. The review of the product with the EA will commence in the next couple of weeks.

Adrian thanked Chris for this update and there were no comments or questions.

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

Adrian asked, having curtailed Bea and Susannah's presentation earlier in the meeting due to time restraints, if there was anything they wished to add or any questions that anyone wished to raise. Susannah advised the paper provides further information about acknowledging the scale of the challenge and resourcing engagement appropriately and again re-emphasised the point that adaptation is going to require long-term funding for long-term engagement.

Adrian thanked Susannah for her comments and advised this is quite intensive on both communities and organisations that are seeking to work with them. He highlighted that this is another call on the overall balance between capital and revenue funding and for this space to be effective it needs to be under continuing review.

David Shaw highlighted an item of AOB raised in the chat function by Paul Barnes, where Paul commented that we need to review the evidence in light of what we now see to re-examine our North West Shoreline Management Plan, particularly in light of the strategic loss of transport linked to BAE and Sellafield.

Adrian asked for this to be detailed under AOB and advised as the North West SMP has just been through a significant refresh and there is now a Cumbria Coastal Strategy which partly deals with some of those infrastructure threats which Paul relates to, he advised this will be picked up in due course and thanked David for highlighting Paul's comment.

Adrian thanked Members for their attendance to the meeting.

The next RFCC meeting will be held face to face in Kendal, Cumbria on 19 July 2024.