

North West Regional Flood and Coastal Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Friday, 14 March 2025

Held virtually via MS Teams

Attendees:

Members

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 Alan Quinn, Greater Manchester Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Councillor Phillip Cusack, Greater Manchester Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Councillor Laura Boyle, Greater Manchester Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Councillor Tony Brennan, Merseyside Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Councillor Daniel Barrington, Merseyside Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Maria Roberts, Cheshire West and Chester Council
Kate Morley, EA Appointed Member – Conservation (part attendance)
Chris Findley, EA Appointed Member – Development and Sustainable Investment
Carolyn Otley, EA Appointed Member – Communities
Susannah Bleakley, EA Appointed Member – Coastal
Amy Cooper, EA Appointed Member, Water and Sewerage Industry
Neville Elstone, EA Appointed Member – General Business and Assurance
Paul Barnes, EA Appointed Member – Agriculture and Land Management
Stewart Davies, Environment Agency Board Member for the North West

Environment Agency Officers

Ian Crewe, EA Area Director, Greater Manchester Merseyside and Cheshire (GMMC)
Nick Pearson, Area Flood Risk Manager (Greater Manchester)
Mary-Rose Muncaster, Area Flood Risk Manager (Merseyside and Cheshire)
Richard Knight, Area Flood Risk Manager (Cumbria)
Marina Powell-Currie, FCRM PSO Team Leader (C&L)
Anthony Swarbrick, Area Operations Manager (C&L)
Sally Whiting, Senior FCRM Advisor
Adam Walsh, FCRM Programming Manager (C&L)
Andy Tester, FCRM Programming Manager (GMMC)
Rachel Harmer, RFCC Secretariat
Ayush Sheth, FCRM Programming Advisor (GMMC)
Sarah Fontana, Capital Programme Co-ordinator
Mia Mullender, Local Authority Capital Projects Advisor (C&L)
Robert Taylor, Local Authority Capital Projects Advisor (C&L)
Rachael Broadhurst, Local Authority Capital Projects Advisor (GMMC)
Gary Hilton, Local Authority Capital Projects Advisor (GMMC)
Stuart Mault, FCRM Programming Advisor (C&L)

Local Authority Observers (Councillors and Officers):

Jason Harte, Westmorland and Furness Council
Ali Harker, Cumbria Strategic Flood Risk Partnership

Andrew Harrison, Cumberland Council
Karl Melville, Cumberland Council
Nick Rae, Westmorland and Furness Council
Clare Nolan-Barnes, Blackpool Council
Lorah Cheyne, Lancashire Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Imran Munshi, Blackburn with Darwen Council
Sarah Wardle, Merseyside Strategic Flood Risk Partnership (Part attendance)
Laura Gilmore, Liverpool City Council
Francis Comyn, Rochdale Borough Council (Part attendance)
Jill Holden, Greater Manchester Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Remya Raveendran Sobhana, Greater Manchester Combined Authority
David Boyer, Warrington Borough Council
Jim Turton, Warrington Borough Council
Jonathan Parry, Warrington Borough Council
Matt Winnard, Cheshire Mid Mersey Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Guy Metcalfe, Cheshire East Council
Katie Eckford, NW Shoreline Management Plan Co-ordinator / Coastal Group Secretariat

Other observers:

Chris Isherwood, Jacobs
Talha Esmail, United Utilities
Ian Kell, Benson and Sanders Flood Action Group
James Copeland, National Farmers Union
Liam Reeves, Amey

25 (12) Welcome, Chairman's Introduction & Apologies for Absence

Adrian Lythgo opened the meeting and advised no declarations of interest had been received.

He conveyed apologies from: Councillor Denise Rollo (Cumbria Strategic Flood Risk Partnership); Councillor Karen Shore (Cheshire Mid Mersey Strategic Flood Risk Partnership); Councillor Mhairi Doyle (Merseyside Strategic Flood Risk Partnership) and Rachel Crompton (Lancashire Strategic Flood Risk Partnership).

Representing the Cumbria Strategic Flood Risk Partnership, Members noted Councillor Giles Archibald is in attendance as the correctly nominated substitute for Councillor Denise Rollo.

Representing the Cheshire Mid Mersey Strategic Flood Risk Partnership, Members noted Maria Roberts is in attendance as the correctly nominated substitute for Councillor Karen Shore.

Adrian welcomed the new Greater Manchester RFCC Member Councillor Laura Boyle from Tameside. He also welcomed observers Ian Kell from the Benson and Sanders Flood Action Group, Chris Isherwood from Jacobs consultants, and Talha Esmail from United Utilities.

There were no further comments or questions.

25 (13) Minutes of the RFCC Meeting held on 14 February and actions and matters arising

Adrian Lythgo advised that he wished to add a line to the draft minutes of the 14th February RFCC meeting, which reflects a comment included in the MS Teams meeting Chat function made by Clare Nolan-Barnes of the Lancashire Strategic Flood Risk Partnership.

The line to be added will read:

'In the meeting chat function Clare Nolan-Barnes, on behalf of Blackpool Council and the Lancashire Strategic Partnership, clarified that while they would endorse the local choices allocations that they did not agree with it.'

Members noted this is a factual record of what Clare wrote in the MS Teams meeting chat. Adrian reminded Members that we have been using the word 'endorsement', rather than the word 'agreement', due to the challenging GiA allocation and the large number of moving parts within the programme.

Neville Elstone proposed and Councillor Philip Cusack seconded the minutes of the 14 February 2025 meeting. The minutes of 14 February 2025 RFCC meeting were approved by the Committee.

There were no further matters arising, comments or questions.

25 (14) Indicative GiA funding for 2025/26 and Local Choices

Adrian Lythgo recalled the difficult decisions made at the last meeting with regard to what schemes to support and by implication, what not to support because of the overall level of funding the North West had been allocated, which was somewhat short of the amount needed for all the schemes we had in play.

Members were reminded of the decision to make a significant additional allocation of Local Levy funding to keep as many as possible of the schemes moving forwards that had not received GiA funding. At the 7 March meeting there was opportunity for the Committee to ask any questions and receive any clarification about those schemes that potentially would be Local Levy funded.

Adrian advised that now he was able to share with the Committee that another £9.2 Million of GiA funding has become available to the North West, which has now provided the opportunity for Members to revisit the amount of Local Levy funding being put into schemes alongside some of the Local Choices decisions. Discussions have been ongoing between Risk Management Authorities (RMAs) and the Environment Agency (EA) as to exactly what the balance may look like and Adrian advised that today's meeting will see the outcome from these ongoing discussions, both in terms of GiA and Local Levy. Today's meeting will also include the EA asset maintenance resource allocation for 2025/26. He thanked everyone involved with this process and recognised the time it has taken to get to this point.

Neville Elstone underlined the thanks Adrian had given to all of the teams at the RMAs and the EA for working together and providing an agreed process for proposing and agreeing a way forward. With regard to the 7 March meeting, he referred to the ask from Councillor Tony

Brennan to see more of the detail of those schemes that did not receive any funding allocation, and it was confirmed this information has now been provided. He also highlighted the strong support for Local Levy from several Councillors on 7 March and the increased need for an increase in the Local Levy.

Councillor Giles Archibald enquired how many less homes will be protected across the North West as a result of the refresh/allocation and Local Choices process. Adrian Lythgo advised the number of homes protected will be covered today but noted that it depends where the baseline is considered to be and advised there is not a straightforward answer and there is a sequence of events and annual programme perspectives which can change things. He advised that as a result of the refresh process and Local Choices decisions, more properties will be protected than were going to be at the start of the process, due to the outcomes from some schemes moving from 2024/25 into 2025/26. However this is still less than if the North West had been allocated all of the funding it bid for.

Adam Walsh introduced himself to Members and provided a recap of the 14 February meeting and covered some of the changes that have occurred since the last meeting.

Members were reminded of how the funding is prioritised and allocated nationally and that this approach was approved by the EA Board in line with Defra's current partnership funding policy. The eight principles for prioritising Local Choices allocations were also provided for Members, which had been covered by Nick Pearson at the January meeting. These principles set out that any changes made through Local Choices could not exceed the programme level allocation for each Area and the same or a greater number of properties better protected should be delivered by March 2026.

The 2025/26 indicative allocation for Local Choices for the February meeting was £103.3 Million. Following the additional £9.2 Million GiA allocated (part of the additional £40 Million which Defra have allocated nationally) and the inclusion of the reconditioning programme in GMMC, which totals £9.22 Million, the latest indicative allocation is £122.4 Million for the North West.

Adam advised that the North West has received the highest GiA settlement in the country across the 12 RFCCs, but this is against a back drop of an allocation that is circa £35 Million less than what was bid for and some difficult decisions have had to be made. He also advised there are many projects that have not received any GiA funding and this information was provided to Members in Appendix C of the paper.

Adam highlighted the core GiA allocations against the largest projects in the North West programme showing where the largest amount of spending is occurring. Members noted the significant amount of properties attached to these projects, and to projects where the properties and delivery timescales are more uncertain at this stage, such as Hambleton.

Adam advised of the significant degree of uncertainty around the investment programme, highlighting the fact that currently there is no investment settlement beyond 2025/26 and there is a new Partnership Funding formula and calculator being developed in advance of the next programme. These are areas that will need to be addressed before some of the uncertainty can be removed.

The Committee noted that the additional £40 Million, of which the North West has received £9.2 Million, is to be allocated based on a number of key principles, which include:

- Funding must only be allocated to viable projects without significant funding gaps.
- Ideally there should be a focus on supporting capital maintenance projects.
- Funding, where possible, should benefit other RMA-led (other than the EA) projects but consider decisions already made through Local Choices to date.

Members were reminded that a significant allocation of Local Levy funding had been made to support the continuation of schemes without sufficient GiA allocation, and sacrifices had been made on some larger schemes, reallocating and re-profiling spend to support wider Local Choice decisions (such as the Blackpool Beach Management Scheme, the Kendal Scheme and Longford Brook). The allocation principles for the additional £9.2 Million support improving the Local Levy balance position by replacing some of the previously allocated Local Levy funding with the additional GiA now available.

In terms of properties to be better protected in 2025/26 attached to the indicative allocations, Adam highlighted the Radcliffe and Redvales scheme which has re-profiled outcome delivery for 1,300 properties into 2025/26 with the project due to finish next year. This has resulted in an increase in the number of properties (1,011) to be better protected between the January indicative allocations and the Local Choices allocation now. Members noted the comparison between the July 2024 bid and the Local Choices allocation now, which also shows an increase of 270 properties to be delivered in 2025/26.

Adam advised that the Wyre Beach Management Scheme is progressing well and is now expected to better protect 3,000 properties in 2025/26.

On the EA's Asset Management Resource Investment Programme, Adam provided a summary advising that the North West has received its indicative allocation for 2025/26 of £14.26 Million. The Local Choices process for this funding is ongoing and will conclude mid-April 2025. Members heard the funding allocated will not change however some of the detail within the list of projects will.

Paul Barnes enquired about the costs associated with reservoirs and measures in the interest of safety, specifically enquiring whether these costs should be passed on to reservoir owners. Richard Knight advised that these costs relate to measures in the interest of safety on reservoirs where the EA is the reservoir undertaker. This includes EA flood basins and upstream storage basins, so they are not third-party assets.

Councillor Giles Archibald asked how the refreshed coastal erosion risk maps, the new National Flood Risk Assessment and indeed the climate change allowances are built into the next programme for the longer-term. Adrian Lythgo advised that further announcements are expected on this soon, starting earlier in the 2025/26 year as part of the next CSR and included in this announcement will be a consultation on Partnership Funding rules. It is expected that the new coastal erosion and flood risk assessments and data will inform the investment programme in the future.

Adam Walsh advised that there are many conversations ongoing between the EA and other RMAs taking into account new mapping and NaFRA2. Adrian advised there has to be every likelihood that a new programme will address those known flood risks and some of the longer-term trends.

There were no further comments or questions.

Local Levy Programme

Andy Tester provided Members with an overview of the current Local Levy position, set out the forecast for the 2025/26 Local Levy programme and highlighted some of the key changes that have happened during the last few weeks as part of the Local Choices process.

Members noted the expected 2024/25 year-end balance of £8.7 Million and the expected Local Levy balance for the start of 2025/26 of £13.8 Million, which includes the annual income of £4.7 Million and the expected interest of £0.4 Million. Throughout the last few weeks there has been a significant piece of work to look at the projects coming forward for Local Levy support and the detail of the Local Choices process.

Andy reminded Members of the ten schemes that came forward for Local Levy support as part of Local Choices, which were then closely followed by the announcement of the additional £9.2 Million in GiA funding for the North West.

Members were reminded that Cheshire East Council had withdrawn its request for Ryle's Pool. It was also recalled that four projects had increased their Local Levy request between the 14 February Local Choices meeting and their more detailed presentation at the 7 March meetings. Members were also reminded that the RFCC had approved a one-year increase in the Quick Wins funding from £100k to £250k per partnership for 2025/26 as part of Local Choices.

Given the rapid reduction in the Local Levy balance, Andy provided an illustration of the impact on the Local Levy balance before the announcement of the additional £9.2 Million of GiA funding, where we were originally forecasting to spend £12.1 Million in 2025/26. This would have left a remaining balance of £1.7 Million at the end of 2025/26, and then to just over £1 Million at the end of 2026/27. Members noted that this does not leave much in reserve given current levels of uncertainty and risk.

Members were advised work has been ongoing to look at releasing some of this recently allocated Local Levy funding by using some of the £9.2 Million GiA, reducing pressure on the Local Levy balance.

The Committee received an overview of the proposed changes including:

- Releasing £499.99k of Local Levy funding for the Liverpool Road, Great Sankey scheme with GiA. This scheme is eligible for 100% GiA.
- Meeting the increased funding requests for the two Blackpool schemes – Blackpool Beach Nourishment and Bispham – with GiA, retaining £350K of Local Levy each provided through Local Choices. This reduces the call on Local Levy by a further £1.45 Million.
- The EA-led Sankey Brook scheme was requesting to re-profile its remaining Local Levy allocation of £592K into 2025/26 to allow the scheme to progress, albeit more slowly, having received no GiA allocation. An allocation of additional GiA is now proposed to support this scheme, reducing the need for Local Levy in 2025/26 to a reduced £161k. Again this relieves the immediate pressure on the Local Levy balance by releasing £498K in 2025/26.

Members noted these proposed changes release a total of £2.4 Million back into the Local Levy balances, which puts the Local Levy funding in a stronger and more stable position as it heads into the next financial year. The forecast spend for 2025/26 is now £9.6 Million rather than the previously forecasted £12 Million and the expected balance at the end of 2025/26 is £4.2 Million. Andy advised this will provide more longevity in terms of the programme along with a reduced level of risk and also presents us with more of an opportunity to consider in-year bids during 2025/26.

Councillor Alan Quinn remarked that it was good news about receiving the additional GiA funding. He expressed his view that the RFCC should not let the Local Levy balance drop below a minimum of £2 Million and noted with reduced funding and climate change, more schemes will be coming forward for Local Levy support. He feels the Local Levy balance needs to be primed, and consideration should be given to increase the annual increase in the Local Levy income rate well above the previous level of 3%.

Adrian Lythgo thanked Andy for his overview and summarised the proposal to apply some of the additional GiA to some of the schemes which had requested Local Levy, which then releases money back into the Local Levy balance. This means the Local Levy is in a much better position to cope with any new storms during the next 12 to 24 months and he reflected on the fact that Local Levy is much more flexible in its use than GiA.

Members were asked to consent the GiA Local Choices allocation for 2025/26.

Votes in favour: Councillor Giles Archibald, Councillor Brennan, Councillor Barrington, Councillor Clarke, Councillor Hugo, Councillor Cusack, Councillor Quinn, Councillor Boyle, Neville Elstone, Carolyn Otley, Kate Morley, Susannah Bleakley, Paul Barnes, Chris Findley and Maria Roberts.

Members were asked to consent the EA Asset Resource Maintenance Programme allocation for 2025/26.

Votes in favour: Councillor Giles Archibald, Councillor Brennan, Councillor Barrington, Councillor Clarke, Councillor Hugo, Councillor Cusack, Councillor Quinn, Councillor Boyle, Neville Elstone, Carolyn Otley, Amy Cooper, Kate Morley, Susannah Bleakley, Paul Barnes, Chris Findley and Maria Roberts.

Members were asked to approve the updated Local Levy allocation for 2025/26. Adrian Lythgo advised by supporting these proposals this includes the returning of funds to the Local Levy balance and supporting those schemes that have come forward for Local Levy.

Votes in favour: Councillor Giles Archibald, Councillor Brennan, Councillor Barrington, Councillor Clarke, Councillor Hugo, Councillor Cusack, Councillor Quinn, Councillor Boyle, Neville Elstone, Carolyn Otley, Kate Morley, Susannah Bleakley, Amy Cooper, Chris Findley and Maria Roberts.

Adrian Lythgo advised Members to also note the return of £2.4 Million back into the Local Levy balance as a result of the changes.

Finally, Adrian highlighted there has been some discussion about what a minimum Local Levy balance should be, given the level of risk going into a new programme and without being able

to predict what next winter's weather will bring. He proposed that rather than take any further comments today, a paper should be brought to the April meeting for Members to consider what an appropriate minimum balance should be. This would directly address the point raised by Councillor Alan Quinn.

Councillor Giles Archibald advised this will be beneficial and highlighted the paper should also indicate when and under what circumstances the minimum Local Levy balance could be used.

Adrian Lythgo agreed with this and remarked that the Committee has previously made it clear that they wished to see use made of what was previously quite a high Local Levy balance, to support local communities and schemes. The minimum balance discussion wouldn't be anything to change what's in the existing Local Levy strategy, which does exactly what's required, though clearly you could make changes to that, but the paper would be very much just to look at the level of balance that we would need to carry, recognising the current level of risk. We could have been in a position of having less than £1 Million as a balance going into a year where it didn't look like any in-year GiA would be available and when in all likelihood there will be storms which we may need to respond to in-year.

There were no further questions or comments.

Resolved: The NW RFCC:

- consented the Local Choices allocation for the 2025/26 investment programme
- consented the EA Asset Resource Maintenance Programme for 2025/26
- approved the updated Local Levy allocation for 2025/26 and noted the current position and latest spend forecast of the Local Levy Programme

25 (16) Any Other Business

Stuart Davies congratulated the Committee on the process that's been run over the last few months and thanked everyone involved including Local Authorities, other RMAs, EA officers, and RFCC Members for their work to get to this position. He noted that whilst the Committee is not accountable for delivery of the programme, it is in a good position to identify risks to delivery and requested if anyone has visibility of any risks emerging then to flag them so the appropriate interventions can take place as early as possible.

Adrian Lythgo thanked Stuart and advised with regard to Local Choices, colleagues have been looking at the detail for over a year and there has been strong focus on the ability to deliver in the next 12 months. He noted colleagues' frustrations where there are schemes which are able to be delivered, but which we didn't originally have the flexibility to move forwards. However the additional £9.2 Million has now allowed some of those schemes to deliver in the next 12 months.

Councillor Giles Archibald also gave his thanks and highlighted that he is to return as the representative of the Cumbria Strategic Flood Risk Partnership in April and is keen to again pick up the point he has made previously with regard to peat and its restoration in the region. He added peat management is important for several reasons, not least of which is flooding and asked if this could feature on a future meeting agenda. Adrian confirmed this will be taken forward to agenda planning and noted it may be more likely to be a July rather than an

April agenda item. He also highlighted the recent article on Nature North's Investment Plan, which includes a peat dimension.

Neville Elstone advised the issue of peat is part of a broader land management piece, in which several people on the Committee are looking at the national picture in terms of land incentives. He highlighted some of the landscape recovery schemes which are working their way through the ELMS process at the moment and will also contribute to this. Adrian advised this is one of the things which may become clearer in the context of a new flood programme, as it is certainly one of the policy areas being discussed.

Councillor Alan Quinn thanked Councillor Archibald for raising natural flood management and advised how great it will be in the future in the North West to see the licenced release of beavers back into the wild. Neville Elstone highlighted there have already been some authorised beaver releases within Cumbria.

Adrian thanked Members and support officers for their attendance and for all the effort that has gone into the work over the last ten weeks. He apologised for the lateness of the papers on some occasions but advised this has only been to secure as clearer picture as possible for decisions to be based on. He reflected that Members can be satisfied, if not pleased, with where the Committee has been able to get to with this year's Local Choices.

There were no further items of AOB.

The next RFCC meeting will be held via MS Teams on Friday 25 April 2025.