

North West Regional Flood and Coastal Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Friday, 24 October 2025

Held at Halliwell Jones Stadium, Warrington

Attendees:

Members

Adrian Lythgo, Chairman
Councillor Giles Archibald, Cumbria Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Councillor Jane Hugo, Lancashire Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Councillor Alan Quinn, Greater Manchester Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Councillor Mandie Shilton Godwin, Greater Manchester Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Councillor Philip Cusack, Greater Manchester Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Councillor Elizabeth Grey, Merseyside Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Councillor Mark Goldsmith, Cheshire Mid Mersey Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Councillor Sam Naylor, Cheshire Mid Mersey Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Terri McMillan, EA Appointed Member – Business and Assurance
Chris Findley, EA Appointed Member – Development and Sustainable Investment
Carolyn Otley, EA Appointed Member – Communities
Amy Cooper, EA Appointed Member - Water and Sewerage Industry
Carl Green, Chair of the North West and North Wales Coastal Group

Environment Agency Officers:

Ian Crewe, 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)
Sally Whiting, Senior FCRM Advisor, GMMC
Andy Tester, FCRM Programming Manager, GMMC
Rachel Harmer, RFCC Secretariat
Gary Hilton, FCRM Local Authority Capital Projects Advisor, GMMC

Local Authority Observers (Councillors and Officers):

Jason Harte, Westmorland and Furness Council
Ali Harker, Cumbria Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Nick Rae, Cumberland Council
Clare Nolan-Barnes, Blackpool Council
Lorah Cheyne, Lancashire Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Jill Holden, Greater Manchester Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Jim Turton, Warrington Borough Council
Matt Winnard, Cheshire Mid Mersey Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Paul Wisse, Sefton Council
Guy Metcalfe, Cheshire East Council
Dan Matthews, Cheshire East Council
Sharma Jencitis, United Utilities (UU)

Presenters:

Katie Eckford, NW RFCC Shoreline Management Plan Co-ordinator
Tom Doyle, Senior Engineer, Arup

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

Adrian Lythgo opened the meeting and welcomed everyone.

Members noted and approved the following correctly nominated RFCC LLFA Member substitutes:

- Paul Wisse representing the Merseyside Strategic Flood Risk Partnership on behalf of Councillor Daniel Barrington.
- Clare Nolan-Barnes representing Lancashire Strategic Flood Risk Partnership on behalf of Councillor James Shorrock.
- Councillor Giles Archibald may need to leave the meeting early and if so has nominated Jason Harte to represent the Cumbria Strategic Flood Risk Partnership on his behalf.

Adrian conveyed apologies from: Councillor James Shorrock (Lancashire Strategic Flood Risk Partnership); Councillor Daniel Barrington (Merseyside Strategic Flood Risk Partnership); Kate Morley (RFCC EA Appointed Member – Conservation); Susannah Bleakley (RFCC EA Appointed Member – Coastal Issues), Carol Holt, EA Area Director (Cumbria and Lancashire (C&L)) Fiona Duke, EA Area Flood Risk Manager (Lancashire) and Adam Walsh, EA FCRM Programming Manager (C&L).

Adrian advised no declarations of interest had been received.

Terri McMillan and Councillor Sam Naylor were both welcomed to their first RFCC meeting. Each RFCC Member introduced themselves for the benefit of those in the room. Tom Doyle, here to co-present the Asset Data Sharing and Mapping Project was also given a warm welcome.

Adrian highlighted his quarterly Chair's report shared with Members on 29 September and advised there have been a few national developments since then. Members noted there is no quarterly flood incidents report this time due to there being no significant flooding to report, although operationally teams across the Environment Agency (EA) and Local Authorities (LAs) have been very busy. He noted that even when there have been no reports of internal flooding it does not mean there hasn't been, it just means that our teams have not been made aware.

He highlighted the recent Flood Action Week, covered in activities and press coverage both regionally and nationally. There has been a large focus on Property Flood Resilience (PFR) with the launch of a national paper by Professor Peter Bomfield, called Flood Ready 2025, and a regional launch around Property Flood Resilience (PFR) at Lancaster University and a visit of the Flood Mobile supported by Flood Mary.

He touched on recommendations made recently by the Environmental Audit Committee around increasing Government spending on flood risk management and taking an even more

strategic and integrated approach to flood resilience. Adrian highlighted the information Papers and particularly the quarterly report from United Utilities (UU) which includes an update on their now statutory Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan (DWMP) and updates on their work in the five sub regions.

Members also noted the information paper on the outcome of the work by the Lynster Farmers Group on the River Winstre Rehabilitation Project in Westmorland and Furness, partly funded by the RFCC. A brief presentation will be provided later in the meeting.

25 (32) Minutes of the RFCC meeting held on 11 July and matters arising

The minutes of the 11 July RFCC meeting were proposed by Councillor Mandie Shilton Godwin and seconded by Councillor Alan Quinn.

No comments or questions were raised.

The minutes of the 11 July 2025 RFCC meeting were approved by the Committee.

25 (33) Government response to the consultation on reforming our approach to floods funding

Following the extensive Investment Reform consultation in June and July this year, the final flood funding policy was published on 14th October. Nick Pearson provided Members with a summary overview of the Government's response.

Members noted:

- Investment is being targeted where it's needed using flood risk data such as NaFRA2 along with local insights, therefore using a consistent form of data to inform investment decisions.
- The aim to simplify the process and speed up the project lifecycle.
- The switch towards investing more in natural flood management, flood resilience and refurbishment of existing assets, with less funding for more traditional defence type projects.
- That the policy will be reviewed in three years' time.

Members noted the three parts of the revised funding policy:

- Funding eligibility
- Prioritisation by value for money
- Strategic objectives

Changes to the investment programme metrics was also summarised.

Adrian commented that the new policy contains many changes the Committee will broadly welcome and will be pleased to see a new, more flexible approach coming in, which will simplify the system alongside ongoing very significant funding investment in flood defences.

With more projects being eligible for more funding, he highlighted that there will now be more competition for investment. The funding allocation for 2026/27 will be the largest the North

West has ever had but there will continue to be challenges with some projects unfunded. Members recognised the changes in policy won't by themselves immediately address all the flood risk there is and welcomed the national capital money going to refurbish assets across all Risk Management Authorities (RMAs), provided that they have been maintained properly to date.

Adrian advised the final question in the consultation was about the extent to which local Committees could have more influence through local choices, something supported by all committees nationally. The outcome is that currently Committees don't have any more explicit influence than they had under the previous policy and there are now a number of things which are now nationally driven. Defra themselves have highlighted that there's more local choice, as less Local Levy will be devoted to supporting national capital investments.

Carolyn Otley commented that £300 Million for Natural Flood Management (NFM) sounds good but when considered within the wider context it begins to look slightly less ambitious. The allocation for deprived communities is similar.

Councillor Giles Archibald enquired about partnership funding, who the partners will be that we will need to raise funding from and who will be approaching businesses about this issue. Adrian Lythgo advised the largest partner in this space is United Utilities (UU). Beyond that it is clear this funding needs to be non-government funding. He advised the RFCC's approach to this has always been bottom up and the best way to source partnership funding is through local teams and through existing local relationships with support from councillors. Adrian added that if there is anything the Committee can do in a strategic sense to support that activity, then to come back with suggestions.

Councillor Mandie Shilton Godwin welcomed the changes but raised her concern about how this funding policy will sit alongside devolution and believes there is still much central control, however people still need to be able to get on with the work. She also raised concern about the £3 Million and 90% rules with regard to coastal schemes and questioned how expensive coastal schemes are going to be delivered. Carl Green shared her concerns.

Adrian advised the call for evidence part of the consultation is longer term and as yet there has been no guidance from Government on their thinking about future changes and how RFCCs might work in a different way with elected Mayors and the Mayoral Combined Authorities. He added that the existing NW RFCC arrangements have been developed explicitly to work with sub regional FCERM partnerships including mayoral arrangements where they exist in the north west.

Members noted the changes the new funding policy will bring in and acknowledged the need to continue to work together and press the issues with regard to implementation and how it will work in practice.

There were no further comments or questions.

25 (34) Report from the RFCC Finance and Business Assurance Sub Group meeting

As new Chair of the RFCC Finance and Business Assurance Sub group, Terri McMillan reflected that the Subgroup meeting on 9 October had been interesting and many items had been discussed.

Andy Tester presented on the investment programme, first advising Members of the terminology change, from 'capital programme' to 'investment programme', given new financial rules about what activity can be classed as capital, and the greater mix of capital and resource funding making up the programme. He explained the CDEL (Capital Departmental Expenditure Limit) and RDEL (Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit) split. Based on National Audit Office (NAO) findings there is a new requirement to make a slightly different distinction between capital and resource and for this to be more transparent. The activity dictates the type of spend and therefore we are not able to move funding between CDEL and RDEL. There are national level CDEL and RDEL budget allocations which we need to adhere to. Therefore, the CDEL/RDEL split along with the overall spend/allocation will be managed and reported over the course of the year, and we will be required to meet the budget on all three elements. This is an added complexity which will be managed by Programming teams and reported to the RFCC as simply and clearly as possible.

A brief overview of the investment programme for the current 2025/26 year was provided, covering the forecast for properties to be better protected against the North West target. Members noted we are currently forecasting to fall slightly short of the North West target but within 90% which equates to Green on the national scorecard. Andy reported that the teams are also working to see what else could be achieved over the next couple of quarters to reach our target and hopefully exceed it. Overall, we are in a strong position.

He covered the funding that has been allocated (including FCRM GiA (Grant in Aid) and Local Levy) and latest spend forecasts, which shows we are expecting to draw down £5.9 Million more than the £141.06 Million allocation, representing a 4.4% overprogramme. This is within the maximum 5% overprogramming advised by the national programme management office at this point in the year, so again a strong position.

On capital efficiencies claimed, Andy acknowledged the North West have struggled to reach our targets year on year. This year we have seen an increase over previous years and so whilst it has been a slow start, we are starting to make some ground and there are some live submissions which are making their way through the process.

Members were advised of risks to the programme including:

- National RDEL overspend may impact local flexibility.
- Efficiency savings remain significantly below target (40% shortfall), potentially risking future funding.
- Delay to Local Choices may impact scheme progression and affect delivery confidence.

The spend forecasts for both C&L and GMMC are in line with budgets and with no over-programming permitted.

Both North West EA Areas have a high percentage of assets at required condition, well above the national target of 92.5%. However, in terms of local Area targets, C&L are showing as red due to having a very high 97.7% target. They are currently achieving 96.6% of assets at the right condition, but there is a lot of reconditioning work required right now and the assets are challenging and complex to fix. For GMMC area, there are a lot more 'below required condition' assets, mainly as a result of the December 2024/January 2025 flood events. GMMC are currently at 92.6% against their 93.4% target, which is expected to be reached, but which relies heavily on all planned GMMC work being delivered. It was noted that both areas are actively working to meet their targets and opportunities and challenges for both areas were shared.

Andy Tester described the annual capital programme refresh cycle for all RMAs advising that the national process is currently a few weeks behind where it would normally be, but which is expected to complete to schedule.

Members received key headlines relating to this year's Local Choices which will be the subject for the additional meeting on 28 November:

- Funding bids submitted as part of this year's annual refresh have far exceeded available budgets.
- This year's allocation for 2026/27 is the first allocation of a 3-year programme
- The indicative allocation received was on 1 October 2025

The national criteria for Local Choices, which significantly limits the degree of choice for the RFCC, was also provided.

Andy reported that 90 schemes had submitted funding bids, with 49 receiving an indicative allocation and 41 with no GiA funding in 2026/27.

The total North West bid was for £221 Million and the indicative allocation received was £155 Million - £66 Million less. Andy advised that it is important to note that the North West received the highest allocation of all RFCCs across the country. It is the large number of schemes in construction which are taking up much of the allocation.

Andy Tester highlighted the additional RFCC Finance and Business Assurance Sub group meeting scheduled for 28 November to consider and approve Local Choices, advising that conversations have already commenced and will be in progress until 14 November to inform the meeting.

Adrian Lythgo asked Members to formally delegate full decision-making powers to the RFCC Finance and Business Assurance Sub group for Local Choices at the 28 November meeting. This was approved and there were 13 votes in support of this.

There were no further comments or questions.

Local Levy Programme

Andy Tester provided an updated overview of the Local Levy programme. The resource at the start of 2025/26 was £15.418 Million (£4.681 Million income plus £10.337 Million carried forward from 2024/25, and £0.4 Million of interest earned on the balance). The latest spend forecast for 2025/26 is £9.137 Million, which will leave an expected remaining balance of £6.282 Million at the end of the 2025/26 financial year.

Members noted there are no requests for Local Levy funding this quarter, other than the request that will be discussed under the Business Plan agenda item.

Resolved: The North West RFCC:

(2025/26 investment programme)

- Noted the formal name change from 'capital programme' to 'investment programme' and the additional management and reporting on CDEL (Capital Departmental Expenditure Limit) and RDEL (Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit) for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Grant in Aid (FCERM GiA).
- Noted the progress on delivering the 2025/26 investment programmes.
- Noted the pressure on RDEL projects and potential impacts on the Local Levy programme.

(Investment Programme Refresh/Local Choices)

- Noted the details of the submitted Phase 1 funding bid (submitted on 31 July 2025)
- Formally delegated full decision-making powers to the RFCC Finance and Business Assurance Sub group for Local Choices at the 28 November meeting.

(Local Levy Programme)

- Noted the update in delivering the 2025/26 Local Levy programme

RFCC Business Plan Update

Sally Whiting provided an update on delivery of RFCC Business Plan projects, referring to additional detail in the information papers and on the North West RFCC SharePoint site. She summarised the progress status of projects, reported on the in-year investment and spend forecast, and indicated investment needs for the next two years.

She touched on information in the report on the Amber rated projects where issues are being resolved.

She reported two completed projects for this last quarter: Planning and Development Evidence Gathering (ID10) and Asset Data Sharing and Mapping Project (ID4/13).

Sally provided an overview of a reprofiling of the Local Levy funding across years for the Wyre NFM Project.

There was one new Local Levy request for this meeting round - £150K for funding development of peatland restoration across the North West, which had been considered and

recommended by the Finance and Business Assurance Subgroup. Sally summarised this work, which will help to maximise existing opportunities and help to maintain and upscale the ongoing peat restoration programme across the North West. This will be a £50K allocation to support the peatland restoration programmes in each of Cumbria, Lancashire, and GMMC, working with the established peat partnerships.

Vote: Approved: There were 13 Members in support of this £150K Local Levy funding request.

Resolved: The North West RFCC:

- Noted the Business Plan update report including the issue relating to projects ID5/5a/6/7.
- Noted the funding reprofiling for the Wyre NFM project (ID2.1)
- Formally recognised the completion of projects:
 - Asset data sharing and mapping (ID4/13)
 - Planning and development – Evidence gathering (ID10)
- Approved the investment of £150K of Local Levy in 2026/27 for the Peatland Restoration Funding Development Project.

Members were reminded of their July approval for Local Levy funding to support the delivery of Property Flood Resilience (PFR) projects over a three-year period. Since July the team have worked at pace to develop a robust and transparent prioritisation process to ensure projects are assessed fairly and funding is allocated appropriately. The proposed methodology for prioritisation was set out in a supporting meeting paper, along with an overview of the feedback from the consultation. Sally Whiting provided a summary of the North West Property Resilience Project methodology of criteria category and proposed weighting calculations.

There were 13 votes of approval of the use of the 4 prioritisation criteria and the proposed weighting.

There were 13 votes of approval that the 2012 funding rule (which prevents funding of measures for properties built after 2012) should not apply to this funding pot.

Resolved: The North West RFCC

- Supported the use of the proposed 4 prioritisation criteria and the proposed weighting.
- Confirmed that the 2012 funding rule should not apply to this funding pot.

RFCC Quick Wins Funding Review

Sally Whiting provided an overview of the Quick Wins funding review, which had been led by her and Sarah Fontana since July. The purpose was to review the successes, challenges and learning from Quick Wins in previous years, and to inform the RFCC's decision on the level of Quick Wins funding for 2026/27 and beyond.

Members received several key proposals from the review relating to: the total Quick Win funding allocation; the allocations to partnerships; and improvements to the management and process of Quick Win funding.

The first proposal from the Quick Win Review Group is for a total Quick Win allocation of £800k per year and, secondly, for this to be a formal three-year funding commitment (£2.4 Million over the next three years). This will enable the partnerships to have certainty of the level of Quick Wins funding over the next three years to allow a pipeline of projects to be developed but also allows greater flexibility for the partnerships to manage their Quick Wins programmes in line with project investment need, and removes issues around year-end claims. There is a proposed tolerance for the partnerships to use up to 25% more or less than the annual allocation. However, Sally was keen to make clear that there remains the expectation that the partnerships will seek to develop a programme which broadly adheres to the annual allocations, and there should not be any back-end loading of the spend across the three years.

On the allocation of funding across the partnerships, Sally confirmed that previously the funding has always been equally split across the partnerships. A range of different allocation criteria (e.g. population, flood risk, number of LLFAs) have been considered and modelled as part of the review which would result in a different allocation to each partnership. The degree of difference in allocation between the partnerships was a specific consideration (given that data and criteria don't always accurately reflect challenges in addressing flood risk on the ground).

Two options for the partnership allocation methodology were proposed:

- **Option 1** – Even distribution between the partnerships
- **Option 2** - Half the allocation shared evenly between partnerships and half based on surface water flood risk

Sally presented the Local Levy balance scenario graph which illustrates what the overall impact of the proposed £800k per year total allocation would be on Levy balances.

Sally reported that the recommendation from the Finance and Business Assurance Subgroup was to support the recommended proposals from the review, and to support Option 1 on the partnership allocation options.

She also reported the final recommendation from the Subgroup that the final decision on increasing the Quick Win funding should be taken to the additional Local Choices meeting on 28 November.

Resolved: The RFCC:

- Supported a Quick Wins (Local Levy) funding allocation equivalent to £800K per year
- Agreed for this to be formally recognised as a 3-year allocation (from 2026/27 - 2028/29)
- For the funding to be shared equally across the five partnerships (Option 1)
- Approved that these recommendations be taken to the additional meeting on 28 November for consideration as part of the wider Local Choices exercise.

There were no further comments or questions.

25 (35) Local Levy Vote 2026/27

Adrian Lythgo reminded Members this is the annual formal Local Levy vote where LLFA RFCC Members are asked to consider and vote on the rate of Local Levy funding for the following year (2026/27). This vote takes place in October every year, to provide Local Authority Finance Directors time to feed this into budget preparations for the 2026/27 financial year.

Adrian reminded Members of the wide uses that the Levy is put to and summarised its key uses including contributions to flood risk schemes as part of partnership funding, the funding of revenue resources to allow important work to be done, including Business Plan projects, and it provides our programme of work with flexibility and momentum, which we would not have otherwise. He advised he is always aware that Local Authorities are making a conscious decision to support flood risk investment in their local areas and there is a large opportunity cost to Local Authorities as this forms part of their Council Tax threshold.

Adrian advised of the nominated substitutes by LLFA Members' unable to attend today's meeting and asked for Members to confirm they were happy with the nominations to take place in the voting procedures:

- Paul Wisse nominated by Cllr Daniel Barrington of the Merseyside Strategic Partnership Group
- Clare Nolan-Barnes nominated by Cllr James Shorrock of the Lancashire Strategic Partnership Group

Members confirmed they were happy to support these nominations.

He advised from discussions with Members in advance of this meeting that there are different views in each of the sub regional partnerships about how they would like to proceed for next year and he gave LLFA Members the opportunity to make any comments.

Councillor Giles Archibald commented that all councils are facing severe financial constraints, but recognised a disaster will happen unless we act decisively on all aspects of the environment. He advised with a predicted 40% increase in rainfall and more than that in terms of river flows, there will be severe consequences if we're not doing enough. He advised the Cumbria Partnership are willing to go up to a 4% increase in Local Levy contributions.

Councillor Alan Quinn noted many schemes will get 90% of their funding requirements, but the rest will fall to partnership funding and Local Levy contributions. He advised the situation in the North West will only get worse. He advised that all councils are under pressure with austerity/ He reported that the Greater Manchester Partnership supports a 5% increase in Local Levy contributions.

Councillor Jane Hugo advised there had been some difficult discussions regarding this and Lancashire are only able to support up to 2.7% increase in Local Levy contributions.

Councillor Elizabeth Grey advised the Merseyside Partnership were able to support a 3% increase in Local Levy contributions.

Councillor Mark Goldsmith of the Cheshire Mid Mersey Partnership advised they wish to see no increase in Local Levy contributions for next year.

Adrian advised voting procedures will commence with a vote on a 5% increase and then work down from that.

A 5% increase in Local Levy funding was supported by all three members of the Greater Manchester Partnership only. Seven LLFA Members voted against this.

A 4% increase in Local Levy funding was supported by all three members of the Greater Manchester Partnership and Councillor Giles Archibald from Cumbria. Six LLFA Members voted against this.

Adrian then asked if anyone would like to propose a 3% increase. Councillor Elizabeth Grey formally proposed a 3% increase, which was seconded by Councillor Giles Archibald.

Six Members in total supported this, Councillor Jane Hugo and Clare Nolan-Barnes abstained from voting and Councillor Mark Goldsmith and Councillor Sam Naylor voted against 3%

By majority the Committee voted that the Local Levy for 2026/27 should be increased by 3%.

On behalf of the Committee Adrian thanked the LLFAs for this support as he is very aware of the opportunity cost of the investment and extreme pressures in every council, but some even more than others.

Resolved: The Committee:

- Agreed a 3% increase to the Local Levy for 2026/27
- In accordance with section 23(3) of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 it was agreed that the sum of £4.821 Million be met from the levy in 2026/27 and that the Environment Agency issue a levy under section 17 of that Act on those County and Unitary Councils shown below, whose areas are situated in whole or in part in the area of the Environment Agency's North West Flood and Coastal Risk Management Region for the financial year 2026/27 The levies made on those councils shall be paid by them in four equal payments on 1 May 2026, 1 July 2026, 1 October 2026 and 1 January 2027.

County Councils:

Derbyshire, Lancashire, Northumberland, North Yorkshire, Shropshire and Staffordshire.

Unitary Authorities:

Blackburn-with-Darwen, Blackpool, Bolton, Bury, Cheshire West and Chester, Cumberland, Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Sefton, Stockport, St Helens, Tameside, Trafford, Warrington, Wigan, Wirral, and Westmorland and Furness.

There were no further comments or questions.

Planning and Development Evidence Gathering (ID10)

Adrian advised one of the ambitions in the RFCC Business Plan is achieving climate resilient planning, development and infrastructure, and one of the strategic aims that we've set for ourselves is to build increasingly strong links between LLFAs and local planning authorities (LPAs), who have a key role to play in ensuring that new developments remain resilient to climate change, and future flood risk is taken account of in planning decisions. He highlighted we already know that there are challenges of resource and capacity and skills within LPAs and we wanted to understand the degree to which that was a real constraining factor within the system.

Sally Whiting advised through David Shaw (former RFCC Member and former professor in geography and planning at Liverpool University), we enlisted the work of students to carry out evidence gathering projects as part of a Planning in Practice module (Year 4) of their Planning Masters degree.

Members were advised the North West wide project was a 2-year initiative. The projects carried out in 2022/23 were:

- Project 1 - How local planning authorities deal with flood risk management issues in decision-making
- Project 2 - Understanding the important factors taken into account when a local planning authority seemed to disregard the advice of the Environment Agency
- Project 3 - The role of planning consultants in minimising flood risk in major new developments

The commission for the 2023/24 projects was to evaluate the extent to which planning conditions are used to address various flooding concerns and the mechanisms by which such conditions are effectively discharged. Five project groups each focussed on one of the sub-regional partnership areas.

Members received a brief summary of the findings of each of the projects along with the students' recommendations of what could help moving forwards.

Members noted in general there is wide support for the implementation of Schedule 3, which is still awaiting the Government's final decision, along with the note that this will need adequate resources and training.

Overall, Chris advised the system is working pretty well but there are improvements that can be made and lots of change going ahead in the Planning field. He advised protection around flood risk is hugely important and we need to keep an eye on this moving forwards.

Councillor Giles Archibald enquired about contaminated flooding and described this as a huge issue in Cumbria. Chris advised that this issue had not been part of the project.

Councillor Alan Quinn raised an issue with developers either entirely missing or installing incorrect connections to the sewer network during building works.

Councillor Philip Cusack enquired about the implementation of Schedule 3 in Wales. Sally Whiting advised there is evidence and lessons learned from its implementation in Wales and

there is a clear contrast around the robustness in Wales against what we have in England, of which the details can be made available.

Councillor Mark Goldsmith raised a concern about the lack of strength of local plan guidelines within his council area allowing developers to appeal against requirements. He recognised the concerns of residents about new development and flood risk and asked about how they can strengthen the basis for decision making.

Adrian Lythgo stated that this was a factor that the RFCC had considered after some work in Lancashire, concluding that if Schedule 3 were to be implemented, this would change things considerably, but as it hasn't been, we are limited to operating within the current arrangements and what local plans can achieve.

Chris Findley remarked to recognise the role that local planning authorities can play in taking account of flood risk and ensuring that new development is appropriate and protected, citing an example from Salford where he used to work. A lot of it is down to the detail of local planning, not just about the general policies.

Adrian Lythgo also recognised another factor around how whole catchments and floodplains are planned, recognising a role for regional system planners and some of the other things that the government is starting to consult on with respect to the future of water industry regulation.

Councillor Mandie Shilton Godwin asked whether this relates to fluvial flood risk and surface water flood risk and what we do with this piece of work next to ensure that the outcomes have a legacy. Chris advised fluvial flood risk and surface water flood risk both need to be taken account of in the planning system. He advised a lot is happening in the planning system right now and new national SuDS standards have just come in and advised that it may be beneficial to wait and take a look at this in a year's time to see if and how these measures are being implemented.

Adrian Lythgo advised that we may look to see if there is more good practice to facilitate in this space.

Asset Data Sharing and Mapping Project (ID4/13)

Jill Holden and Tom Doyle provided an overview of the project for Members.

The project, looking at taking a collaborative approach to asset management and maintenance has been a joint initiative by Greater Manchester and Merseyside partnerships, funded through the NW RFCC Business Plan. It aimed to identify solutions to overcome the barriers and challenges in managing asset registers, building strategic relationships between asset owners to better share and map asset data, enabling more collaborative and sustainable maintenance and management of the assets into the future.

Members noted a number of challenges and complexities in collectively managing the assets that form a drainage system including:

- Complexities around drainage asset ownership presents a major obstacle in ensuring the proper stewardship of assets.

- Maintenance regimes and resources required to manage these assets are often underfunded and can be significant in their financial burden.
- Within Local Authorities maintenance funding is competing against other Local Authority priorities.
- A reluctance to take or discharge responsibilities where ownership is unclear.
- Where 3rd party ownership is known, RMAs are not always adequately resourced to pursue enforcement action where inadequate maintenance is contributing to a flood risk.

Tom Doyle described the different phases of the project, stakeholder engagement and summarised a number of data sharing challenges.

Members noted the costs and benefits of data improvements and desired outcomes along with details of collaboration opportunities.

Jill presented the key recommendations from the project including:

- Creating a Data Lead role - to drive data improvement and sharing between partners.
- Establishment of a data institution – develop a regional framework OR align with national framework (if progressed).
- Pilot Project – Undertake a small-scale pilot project to trial shared access to a common data platform.
- Joint procurement – Further explore opportunities for joint procurement of key services and activities identified.
- Disseminate findings of this work via the RFCC and appropriate forums.

Members noted a further update will be brought to a future meeting once further consideration of the scope of the potential pilot project has taken place.

Adrian thanked Jill and Tom for their update. There were no further comments or questions.

25 (37) ‘Landscape in a Changing Climate’ conference reflections

On behalf of the Cumbria Strategic Partnership, Ali Harker provided an overview of the 9 October ‘Landscape in a Changing Climate’ conference. This initiative was funded through the North West RFCC Business Plan and brought together with support from RFCC Members and the CiFR project to share learning about how the landscape is changing as a result of the changing climate.

During the day there were two event sessions including:

Session 1 – how the changing climate drives our thinking, where presentations were provided by United Utilities (UU), EA, Durham University and Network Rail.

Session 2 – Changing climate: shared challenges and shared solutions, where presentations were provided by Forestry England and Lancaster University.

These were followed by discussion groups to improve resilience focussing on a few selected locations in Cumbria, and on what role the RFCC could play in enabling and facilitating better collaboration.

Members noted the event had been well attended with 110 attendees representing 56 organisations, with a number of exhibitors also generating further conversations and debate.

In terms of outcomes, 98% of attendees cited the event worthwhile advising knowledge transfer and networking as some of the main benefits. Attendees noted there was real recognition that 'The whole is greater than the sum of its parts', and that collaboration is vital if we are to respond to climate change impacts and harness the power within our natural landscape.

Ali advised the Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFAs), the EA and the CiFR project will now work together to review the outputs from the workshops, alongside new information from the flood funding reform, to identify potential follow-on actions.

The event findings will be published on the Flood Hub and a link to this will be sent to all event attendees over the next couple of weeks. Outcomes and actions from the place-based workshops will be reviewed and worked through to see what can be progressed through partnership working.

Adrian thanked Ali for her presentation advising there has been real practical benefits of this event, which is why the Committee are hearing about it in terms of getting land managers together, including national landholders. He advised if land management is a significant part of the solution to addressing flood risk locally that having an event similar to this might be a good way of taking networking and collaboration forward.

There were no further comments or questions.

25 (38) Coastal Update

For the benefit of new Members, Katie Eckford provided an overview of Shoreline Management Plans (SMPs) and their key features, noting there are 22 individual policy units along the North West coastline.

SMPs, currently in their second generation, are 100-year plans to manage flood and erosion risks looking at how we protect land, people, nature and the economy. Members noted the SMP is not a legal requirement and does not dictate what must happen, but is a guide to help Local Authorities and communities plan ahead. It also supports long-term planning and investment decisions and aligns with the FCERM Strategy.

Since 2011, a significant amount of SMP work has been carried out and, in 2024, the SMP website was launched. This work is underpinned by a SMP action plan which includes different themed work of which managed realignment has the largest amount of actions.

SMP aspirations set the direction for the next phase of evolution which will focus on:

- managing complexity and uncertainty through evidence-based decision making, ensuring decision are grounded in robust data and analysis.
- mainstreaming nature-based solutions across policy units and epochs, integrating sustainable approaches into coastal management.
- embedding adaptive pathways and triggers, keeping plans flexible and responsive to changing conditions rather than tied to rigid timelines.

Members noted the ambition is to have the SMPs as living documents and acknowledged the importance of them being regularly updated.

Paul Wisse provided Members with an overview of the North West Strategic Regional Coastal Monitoring Programme, which supports the delivery of the SMP, the National FCERM Strategy and the Environment Act. He advised coastal monitoring involves the ongoing collection of data in the coastal environment to understand system variability, is driven by the dynamic nature of coasts, which:

- Builds up of an evidence base to help us understand coastal processes
- Identifies the location and scale of risks
- Enables practitioners to make more informed decisions based on sound evidence.

Members noted there is over 700km of North West coastline which has many coastal protection assets and structures, of different types, ages and conditions, which are the responsibility of a variety of organisations and private owners. Paul described the value of monitoring data and that its value will increase with time as more information is added to it, making this one of the most valuable assets in the North West.

The presentation touched on future funding challenges and Members noted a number of delivered schemes including Anchorholme at Blackpool, Fairhaven to Church Scar at Fylde, Rossall at Wyre and the Morecambe Wave Reflection Wall.

To meet these coastal challenges collectively, Carl Green summarised the concept of a North West Centre of Coastal Excellence, not as a new institution, but as a way to better coordinate and amplify what we already have, by: pooling expertise across disciplines and organisations; sharing tools, data, and learning more effectively; and supporting delivery by aligning resources and building capacity. To ensure the Centre is practical, scalable and sustainable, a phased approach for the way forward is being explored and a pilot is planned, working alongside partners including Nature North and UU. Potential pilots include:

- Development of a Community Engagement Toolkit
- Training & Capacity Building
- Development of a pipeline of activities

Carl advised through Defra's Flood and Coastal Resilience Innovation Programme (FCRIP), bespoke funding for the Our Future Coast project has enabled us to pilot nature-based solutions such as dune restoration and saltmarsh creation, develop adaptive pathways and triggers for future decision-making, and test and trial innovative ways to engage communities. Members noted the Our Future Coast project is currently only funded until March 2027 and at present this will mark the end of the programme, leaving an uncertain legacy. Carl advised the role of the Coastal Centre of Excellence will continue the work started under Our Future Coast to deliver projects funded through to an investible proposition, as well as those supported by Grant-in-Aid and other standard funding routes.

Carl highlighted a number of questions for Members to consider:

- How best can we raise awareness of the SMP and the importance of the coast?
- How to incorporate asset data within EA reporting to the RFCC and nationally?
- How can we raise the opportunities and the risks to decision makers?
- How can we provide investment opportunities and have a central place where this can be shared?

Adrian Lythgo acknowledged coastal erosion and sea level rise as one of the biggest issues for our communities and highlighted this is also about river estuaries and the assets which are subject to that erosion even if they are further inland. The challenge is in getting the broader message out to decision makers about the significance of coastal assets and how much investment and maintenance is required, whether that be traditional or natural.

Councillor Alan Quinn asked if any funding was obtained from the European Development Fund and Carl advised funding was obtained for some of the Blackpool promenade works and some funding for Cleveleys.

Councillor Mandie Shilton Godwin commented on the graphical information which looked at the 1 metre sea level rise by 2100 and asked how far inland from the coast do you need to go to think about the risk to communities? Carl advised there is much uncertainty about this but any sea level rise will also impact draining surface water out as well as not letting in water from the sea.

Adrian advised this connects back to how we can help build the understanding and contribution to the impacts of coastal erosion and how far it goes. He thanked Carl, Katie and Paul for their update and highlighted the issues raised are not just coastal issues. Members were encouraged to forward any thoughts on Carl's questions through to Adrian or Carl outside of the meeting.

There were no further comments or questions.

25 (39) Any other business

Adrian advised that further to his opening remarks on recent flooding, he had been advised that there had been some small-scale internal flooding in Cumbria, which had occurred during the last three months, and he asked for the minutes to reflect this.

A brief presentation from Westmorland and Furness Council was provided on the successful completion of the works on the River Winster Rehabilitation Project.

No other matters were raised. Adrian thanked Members for their attendance and the meeting was closed.