

## Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA)

The SRA was officially launched on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2015 as a response to the floods of winter 2013/14. The SRA is run by a Board of partners from Somerset County Council, five District Councils, the Environment Agency, the Parrett and Axe Brue Internal Drainage Boards, the Wessex Regional Flood & Coastal Committee and Natural England.

The purpose of the SRA is:

*“...to deliver higher standards of flood protection than would be funded nationally, and to create better flood protection and resilience against further flooding by joint planning and delivery (where possible). It will not lessen partners’ and land owners’ existing responsibilities or accountabilities. The existing Flood Risk Management Authorities, including the Internal Drainage Boards, will continue - with increased opportunities to link activities and ensure they benefit from members’ collective experience and knowledge.”*

To this end, the remit of the SRA includes strategic planning, land management and building local resilience as key activities, with community engagement around these responsibilities.

### Funding the SRA

The SRA was set up with interim funding of £2.7m for the financial year 2015/16, from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (£1.9m); Somerset County Council (£600k), the county’s five District Councils and the Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium (£200k combined).

In order to achieve its purpose of delivering higher standards of flood protection, the SRA considered a number of options to find additional funding to support its work. This included:

- Creating a new precepting body (legal power to raise income)
- Creating a new levying body
- Increasing Council Tax
- Extending boundaries of Internal Drainage Boards

Following analysis of all of these options it was decided that the SRA would be established as a new statutory body with the power to raise income countywide from householders (i.e. that the SRA would be made a precepting body with a legal power to raise income).

The Chairman of the SRA wrote to both the Secretaries of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and for Communities and Local Government with a view to discussing and agreeing how to implement this as soon as possible, which requires the Government to pass primary legislation through Parliament.

In December 2015 the Department for Communities and Local Government approved a further interim funding measure in the form of granting Somerset County Council and the five Somerset District Councils the power to raise a shadow precept on Council Tax payers of up to 1.25%, for the purpose of funding the Somerset Rivers Authority in 2016/17. This enabled up to £2.7m via ring fenced council tax increase to fund the SRA’s work in the 2016/17 financial year. Environment Minister Liz Truss told the Oxford Farming Conference in January 2016 she was “glad the Communities Secretary has given the Authority the power to raise a Shadow Precept from this April on the way to long-term local funding.”

### Further information

<http://www.somersetiversauthority.org.uk/>

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