AXE BRUE INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD
PART OF THE SOMERSET DRAINAGE BOARDS CONSORTIUM

BRADBURY HOUSE, 33-34 MARKET STREET
HIGHBRIDGE, SOMERSET, TA9 3BW
TEL: 01278 789906
FAX: 01278 792914
EMAIL: admin@somersetdbs.co.uk

MINUTES OF THE AXE BRUE FINANCE & WORKS SUB-COMMITTEE MEETING
8 JUNE 2026 10.30AM AT BRADBURY HOUSE, HIGHBRIDGE

Attendance:			
Elected Members: Mrs W Welland Mr D Tratt Mr H Smith	**Appointed Members:** Cllr B Filmer Cllr M Stanton Cllr B Knickerbocker Cllr J Cousins	**Officers:** Mrs M Hammond Mr I Sturdy Mrs K Carleton Mrs C Murray Mr M Wall	**Public:**
Apologies:			
Mrs E Scott Mr A Gilling (C)	Cllr R Keen		

Agenda Item:	**Detail:**	**Action:**
1. Attendance and Apologies	The meeting started at 10.31 Vice Chair Wendy Welland (WW) led the meeting as The Chair was unwell. Apologies as per the above Attendance List.	
2. Items Additional to the Agenda	None	
3. Declarations of Interest	None made. To declare as they arise.	
4. Previous Meeting Minutes	***That the minutes were a true and accurate record of the meeting held 12 January 2026*** **Proposed: Bob Filmer** **Seconded: David Tratt** **All in favour**	**RESOLUTION 01**
5. Matters Arising	**Review of Actions:** **ACTION AB/20260112-01** Confirm the date of the Investment Committee meeting. Completed.	
6. Finance Report (RFO)	**Quarterly Reconciliation of Bank Statements:** Maggie Hammond (MH) confirmed that the bank was fully reconciled up to 31/05/2026. **Finance Report/Update:** MH asked the committee to take her paper and appendices as read. The Axe Brue has a surplus of £70k despite the property revaluation. **Income:** Income exceeded the budget by £50k, mainly due to bank interest received, MH will look at procedures to invest this. The rechargeable work budget is always set at zero, so is £18k over. Bryan Knickerbocker (BK) asked for an example of rechargeable work. MH gave the example of M5 channel work done for Somerset Council and recharged.	

	BK asked about the % share of consortium income, MH advised it is a small percentage. **Expenditure:** Maintenance is under budget by £14.8k. Harvey Smith (HS) asked if the underspend is due to less work or more value, Matt Wall (MW) explained that some has still not been done. MH explained inflation is also a factor as less than budgeted for. Overheads are under budget by £83k, mainly from the share of consortium expenditure as the SDBC accounts are not yet approved with the surplus being shared after this. The surplus is mainly around salaries on vacancies. Bob Filmer (BF) asked if vacancies are being recruited for. IDS confirmed they are for a Principal Engineer and Enforcement Officer. MH explained the pending pay award will also take some of this budget. David Tratt (DT) asked about CEO recruitment. IDS updated that the job spec has been written openly to encourage applicants with various skills. Building repairs and maintenance are under budget. The new H&S Co-ordinator will start the spend on identified tasks. Legal and professional fees are £12k over budget. This is mainly legal but also professional fees to revalue the building. BF noted the overspend on legal costs and wondered if we should we make provision in the future. MH will consider this at budget setting. MH has no concerns about the Axe Brue position. BF asked about the 3 strips of land mentioned in Assets (Rooksbridge and Walrow) and why we have them. Matt Wall (MW) explained they are from historic schemes which allowed for access and diversion of a rhyne. MW believes they are correct on Land Registry, but will check this. **Internal Audit Report:** MH advised that we have been awarded Substantial Assurance which is the highest possible award. There were 2 low priority recommendations: 1. review of Members Code of Conduct and H&S Policy. The new H&S Co-ordinator is reviewing the policy; the Code of Conduct is awaiting advice from ADA. 2. To review the aged debtor reports – MH will do this. **Reserve Position**: As at April 26, total reserves are £2.2 million, some of which are ringfenced. Free reserves are £1million 50k. This is more than previously but there are significantly more risks than previous years. MH suggests a review of the risk position. MS asked about Bradbury House works reserves. MH advised work was done to identify issues with the property, and it was decided at Full Board to ringfence funds from free reserves. IDS explained it is to replace rather than repair as previously. BF noted that reserves need to be kept as an equalisation to counter steep rate hikes. MH agreed but advised this is not a full solution. DT asked about SRA contributions. IDS explained that we can't guarantee these and need to bid each year as don't know what the demands on the SRA will be. DT feels a strategy would be useful. IDS noted we are still pushing for a reversal, but we think this will be unlikely. MS commented that EA have not applied for funding for maintenance due to lack of resource to make the bid. SRA are conscious about value offered by IDB rather than EA. HS noted the rivers need work prior to regular maintenance. IDS advised we need absolute clarity on what will and won't be done by the EA as well as what has not been maintained but is still in programme. They are still awaiting costs. We have asked the EA to meet with us and get definitive list and to prioritise most urgent watercourses, show us round them: access/environmental constraints	**ACTION AB/20260608-01** **ACTION AB/20260608-02** **ACTION AB/20260608-03**

	etc. Using PCSA we may then allocate work to existing contractors. BK asked if we have a rechargeable works agreement with the EA. IDS explained it will be done by PCSA. Capacity is the issue. M Wall noted that EA work previously due to be done with SRA funding, but was not. This is also a risk and what agreed may shift. SRA do not pay unless works completed. Bob noted that better for IDB to do at lower cost. IDS agreed but we also have a programme of work, and once identified the scale of the work we would need to increase capacity. David Tratt noted reserve position and asked if we consider index linking with inflation to keep up with fluctuations. MH noted we could link to CPI. MH to recommend to full board in Nov. **End of Year Report including Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR):** Section 1 questions and Section 2 of the AGAR were explained by MH and considered by the committee. BF asked about consortium underspend against increase in staff costs. MH explained the breakdown as part of the consortium costs and budgeted staff. BK noted it is a gross figure and includes NI and contributions. BF asked if we will look at Appendix B as they don't necessarily relate. MH will check these. HS queried building depreciation. MH explained this will be depreciated each year. **Highlights:** in year variance of 2.44%. free reserve position strong but needs review. **Recommendations:** **It is recommended that the Axe Brue Finance & Works Committee recommends to the Full Board that the accounts as presented for 2025/26 are approved.** **It is recommended that the Axe Brue Finance & Works Committee recommends to the Full Board instructs the RFO to review the Reserves Policy to ensure that the minimum provision is adequate.** **It is recommended that the Axe Brue Finance & Works Committee recommends to the Full Board that the answers to the questions within Section 1 of the AGAR are answered yes to all.** **It is recommended that the Axe Brue Finance & Works Committee recommends to the Full Board that Section 2 of the AGAR is approved and the Chairman sign accordingly.** **Proposed: Jon Cousins** **Seconded: Bryan Knickerbocker** **All in favour**	**ACTION AB/20260608-04** **ACTION AB/20260608-05** **RESOLUTION 02**
7. Maintenance Contracts Renewal	MW explained that Brue maintenance contracts are coming to an end, and it may be beneficial to consider rolling them over whilst awaiting confirmation from ADA on new regulations. It would also be an opportunity to align all contracts to renew at the same time. There is the added complexity in fuel prices and tender rates. IDS explained that contracts were previously out of phase which posed the risk of a contractor not winning any and could become monopolised. On the other hand, it is likely we will need more resource and capacity. This will need consideration and a paper, but the immediate issue is the	

	Brue contracts and ADA procurement guidance. New contracts would be tightened and clear. The Chair asked if they would be 3 or 5 year contracts. Officers suggest 3 with scope for a 2-year rollover. Jon Cousins (JC) asked what stage the Brue contract is at. MW advised 3 year and could roll for one or two years. BF noted he has met contractors who are nervous about additional responsibilities. We need to be careful not to lose the ones we need and look at how we work with the, suggested we support those more nervous about change. IDS agreed and explained we have had all 5 main ones in for a workshop on RAMS. MW noted that this is a routine maintenance contract, but we do also call on these contractors for additional works. He will probably bring a paper to the November Full Board. HS suggested adding sections of river. IDS thinks we could add main river work by area to existing contracts where there is capability. **Fuel Costs for Maintenance Renewal** MW raised the impact of rising fuel costs. We need to cater for this with our contractors so that they can continue. MH noted red diesel has increased more than pump diesel. IDS noted a calculation last week with previous year which showed 50% increase. CPI over the same period was 2%. We need to be able to work without driving our suppliers into administration. BF noted the Ukraine solution used previously. MH noted the situation is similar but this was CPI rather than fuel specific. DT wondered if we approach contractors and ask them their future plans to help us plan. He favours a rolling programme to enable contractors to meet our needs. IDS explained we have touched on this with contractors. Some were very interested, others were resistant. Our risk is around knowledge and cost. The Chair asked about the 50% policy, and if it is across boards. North Somerset have resolved and agreed to use one contractor. MW prefers 50% where possible. IDS explained we ask Area Supervisors to document the system well. MW explained we have approved suppliers and a vetting process and go out to tender. IDS advised previous regulations were based on an open list. New ones require a public procurement portal so for contracts above a certain value we will need to advertise. Contractors submit expressions of interest and we then select the most suitable. Caroline Murray (CM) explained we have approached some contractors to get them on our list for more capacity. MW is drafting a paper looking at red diesel costs which is likely to suggest a fuel adjustment mechanism which would look to establish a starting price for contractors and apply a % increase on the fuel cost element only. Some contractors charge more than others, but all have a fuel element so we need to be consistent. We would look to use a monthly fuel price for red diesel as our starting point and we can apply this. Normally we just apply CPI, but this is extraordinary. The chair asked if all use red diesel. MW advised that rhyne work uses red, civils use white. BK asked how we charge. This is the risk element. They submit a per meter rate and we apply CPI. We are offering to share the risk to ensure continuity whilst volatility is there. Paper will go to full Board, but discussion here is useful. The chair asked if contractors have queries, MW advised yes all are concerned. JC feels it is a reasonable proposition, how regularly will we check due to volatility. MW explained that monthly is best and we need to make it rigid. MH explained that it is sharing the risk.	

	MS asked about use of red/white diesel. IDS explained civils use white/agri uses red. Civils is fixed price contracts. MS noted the huge unknowns. MH would like to use government published public indices to protect the public purse and be transparent. MW noted also adjustment to CPI. Also this will not apply to hourly rate work. BK asked if existing contracts allow for this. MW noted we can make changes. The Chair asked that drafts be passed to committee members – IDS noted this MUST be confidential. We will mark as confidential and email out. JC asked when decision will be made, The Chair advised at Full Board. DT suggested mileage rate and asked if applies to members as well as staff. MH will check if members also for HMRC rate.	**ACTION AB/20260608-06** **ACTION AB/20260608-07**
8. EA Main River Maintenance Options	Already covered to a degree earlier in the meeting. IDS noted we have done a full response to the EA consultation. Disappointing that EA advised at SWADA that it will make little difference. DT noted the use of contractors that are capable to main river work and asked if we have an idea. MW noted we would approach them first for hourly or metre rates. There is capability and we know of others who would be interested depending on volume.	
9. Works Report	Caroline Murray (CM)asked members to take her report as read. Noted it is budget rather than spend. Additional budget for Cornmoor not needed and has gone back into works reserves. Vole Road and Access Drove postponed until June. **2025/26 Schedule:** The Cornmoor culvert replacement project was completed £11.5k under budget. A small delay to the Vole Road and Access Drove culvert works was experienced due to road closure delays and availability of materials. These are now scheduled for delivery in June. **2026/27 Schedule:** Expected costs for delivery of the UB36 Tilting Weir have increased based on revised contractor estimates utilising the original tilting weir. **Costings:** Overall funding requirements have not changed significantly since the submission of the budget in January. The main alteration being the anticipated increase in delivery costs relating to UB36 which can be covered by a reallocation of existing reserves. **Recommend to full board to repurpose £10,124.07 of Board Scheme reserves to fund increased costs of delivering UB36 Project.** **Proposed: Jon Cousins** **Seconded: Bob Filmer** **All in favour** BF asked for Parish names on locations. DT asked about Pitland and East update. CM advised the survey has taken place, they have spoken with landowner and schemes are in place. They are looking to do the work this summer pending tender. Re Wessex Water, still negotiating to get onto their long term programme and work around this. DT asked if we can put the downstream section in place in the meantime. CM agreed this would be useful and will pick up outside the meeting with DT/WW.	**RESOLUTION** **ACTION AB/20260608-08**

	DT and the Chair declared an interest.	
10. Any Other Business	BK thanked MH for clear and straightforward accounts HS asked about write off at FB. Land sold 12 years ago. MH advised that the info is from upper areas on amalgamation. A list is sent every year to check before paying. If they have not checked. MH noted we sent maps this year. We want people to pay for the correct land, but can't do all in one go. We have started the process. IDS noted that we ask with rates every year. Will be raised again at Full Board.	
11. Date of Next Meeting	Full Board Meeting Mon 22 June at 10.30 Environment Committee Tues 8 September at 14.00 Finance & Works Mon 19 October 2026 at 10.30 Management 16 June The meeting closed at 12.54	

CHAIRMAN.....DATE ……..

ANNEX A TO

AXE BRUE F&W COMMITTEE MINUTES
DATED 8 June 2026

AXE BRUE F&W MEETING – TABLE OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

Action Number:	Action:	Actionee:
AB/20260608-01	To consider legal fees at budget setting	MH
AB/20260608-02	Check Land Registry re access strips owned by Board	MW
AB/20260608-03	To review the Aged Debtor reports	MH
AB/20260608-04	To consider linking reserves to CPI	MH
AB/20260608-05	To check Appendix B of AGAR	MH
AB/20260608-06	Email Draft Fuel paper to committee confidentially	MW/MH
AB/20260608-07	Check if HMRC mileage increase applies to members as well as staff	MH
AB/20260608-08	To add parish names to locations being discussed	MW