

**MINUTES OF THE AXE BRUE FINANCE & WORKS SUB-COMMITTEE MEETING
20 OCTOBER 2025 10.30AM AT BRADBURY HOUSE, HIGHBRIDGE**

Attendance:			
Elected Members: Mr A Gilling (C) Mr D Tratt	Appointed Members: Mr B Filmer Mr J Cousins Cllr R Keen	Officers: Mrs M Hammond Mr I Sturdy Mrs K Carleton	Public:
Apologies:			
Mr T Whitcombe Mr M Watts Mrs L Scott			

Agenda Item:	Detail:	Action:
1. Attendance and Apologies	1.1. The meeting started at 10.39 1.2. Apologies as per the above Attendance List.	
2. Items Additional to the Agenda	2.1. The passing of Cllr Nick Cottle was noted. 2.2 Maggie Hammond (MH) highlighted plans supplied by the Rating Officer and asked members to look at these after the meeting to assist with any land unidentified. 2.3 IDS gave an election update: the Certificate of the Returning Officer is on the website. There was no poll as we received valid nominations for all districts. One district received two nominations, but one of these was invalid due to non-payment of rates. On this matter officers took advice from ADA, other boards, the Electoral Commission and independent legal advice from Wilkin Chapman Rollits. Any challenge to the decision would be under judicial review. David Tratt (DT) asked if the sample form can be revised. Officers to review. 2.4 DT asked about ringfencing funds for water level management planning. IDS has spoken to Phil Brewin who is developing something for Full Board.	ACTION AB/20251020 -01
3. Declarations of Interest	3.1. None made.	
4. Previous Meeting Minutes	4.1 <i>'That the minutes were a true and accurate record of the meeting held 02 June 2025'</i> Proposed: David Tratt Seconded: Bob Filmer 4 in favour 1 abstention – Roger Keen who was not present	RESOLUTION 01

<p>5. Matters Arising</p>	<p>Review of Actions: AB/20230116-01 Arrange a committee to discuss investments. This is linked to the Finance Policy review and the ongoing ethical investments query which is not straightforward as there is no established consensus in the wider sector. IDS proposed deferring the inclusion of this criteria until it is clear, so that we can proceed with the review of the policy and take it to full board. Jon Cousins asked about Glastonbury Town Council input. Officers confirmed this was helpful but not conclusive. Bob Filmer suggested that this committee recommend that the Investment Policy is finalised without a specific reference to ethical investment until such time that a suitable proposal is brought to the board. Proposed: Bob Filmer Seconded: Jon Cousins All in favour</p> <p>AB/20250602-01 MW to advise location of land opposite Glastonbury Rugby Club (Lowerside Road) so that officers can check if it is agricultural or special levy. MH will see if ratings officer has clarified. AB/20250113-02 M Wall to try again to meet with MW regarding Rousell works. He has not able to meet with him, however the work has been inspected and we are happy. MH confirmed that contractor invoices are not paid unless work is of the correct standard. AB/20250602-02 IDS to check how the rate for rechargeable work is set (by tender or using the same contractor?). IDS advised it is charged at the rate agreed following competitive tender. Any works carried out directly with a landowner is outside the board. DT suggested the query may have related to river work IDS explained any additional work is offered to existing contractors in the first instance, applying rates from our tenders not EA rates. The amounts recharged to the grant are those paid. AB/20250602-03 To agree a new permanent counter-signatory at the next board meeting. JC noted that he is happy to continue as the signatory. AB/20250602-04 Share full list of works identified by Property Subcommittee with other members. To do. Some repairs have taken place. AB/20250602-05 Check if work previously done on roof is guaranteed. Officers have checked and there are no guarantees in place specific to the roof. AB/20250602-06 Check any legal requirement to replace building electrics. Officers have checked and there is no requirement to replace, just to carry out checks every 5 years. This is done and was carried out last year, with any necessary remedial works being carried out. Anything identified is corrected immediately.</p>	<p>RESOLUTION 02</p> <p>ACTION AB/20251020 -02</p> <p>ACTION C/F</p>
<p>6. Finance Report (RFO)</p>	<p>6.1 MH advised that the bank was reconciled to 30/09/25 and all is as expected with no issues.</p> <p>6.2 MH summarised her Finance Report (enclosure 2, circulated with Agenda), with a revised version of the report circulated at the beginning of the meeting, to reflect some changes.</p> <p>6.2.1 External Auditors Report: (Enclosure 3) We have received the external auditor opinion on our AGAR return. They have suggested we should have answered no to 2 of the questions in</p>	

Appendix A. Section 2 and we have had no opportunity to respond before the deadline. The queries related to the Risk Register which they have suggested was not considered in the financial year. We are comfortable that the Boards discussed risk before answering the Audit questions, and have also discussed risk throughout the year. We are happy that risks have been managed. The other item was our response to the Audit Report recommendations. We are comfortable that we implemented action and prioritised it. Their comments make no change to the figures and MH has no concerns as RFO.

IDS noted that he is disappointed at the auditors response, but it presents no business risk. MH will respond to them so that we have a challenge on the record. The auditor has now left the organisation which is likely why the deadline was set.

Members agreed that officers to respond to the Auditors to note our disappointment so that it is on the record.

JC asked about audit report/certificate and if this poses any risk. MH explained that all figures are correct and compliant and that Governance is what has been queried.

MH confirmed the auditor has not asked for this. Their comments are the auditors opinion and there is no material impact unless we were looking to take out a loan.

BF noted that the Board has said we will complete the suggested actions and asked if we are on track to do what we have said we will do.

MH confirmed the Finance Policy is fine, and the Procurement Policy is subject to legislative changes. Scheme of delegation is next on list.

IDS echoed that we have started and are continuing within the timescales. He will bring papers to the Jan meeting to show review of risk register ready for AGAR in June.

Most policies are still fit for purpose.

6.2.2 SDBC Position:

MH explained the SDBC position/forecast as per her Finance Report. She clarified that the variance of £81k (favourable) is mainly due to staff vacancies as the budget is set with all posts filled. There was also an underspend on premises due to warmer weather.

The overspend on office admin is due to licences as we have moved to Office 365 with some of it for 3 years of licences which will show as a prepayment at the end of year. Postage is over budget due to the letters sent to ratepayers on EA maintenance. Professional fees on Calm Engineering are an overspend as they are covering vacancies. Insurance has also gone up.

DT asked if the Consortium should continue looking for engineers or continue using Calm.

IDS explained the EA position may mean we need to increase capacity if central government look to move works to LLFA/IDB's. We currently have no more capacity so would need to recruit the vacancies to meet this demand.

DT asked if we are at capacity with Calm and if a change to EA maintenance would offset this.

IDS explained most work carried out by Calm is for the SRA.

JC queried the amount of time IDS spends on engineering and asked if there is a budget to support the non-engineering side of his role.

IDS noted that we have recruited the Senior Governance Officer to assist with picking some of this up. Elections have taken up a large amount of officer time. A Senior Engineer would be better use of resources. Recruitment is challenging.

**ACTION
AB/20251020
-03**

6.2.3 Axe Brue Position:

The only change from the circulated figures has been as a result of revaluing Bradbury House. It has been valued at £350k, the value on the balance sheet was more than this. Regulations stipulate this must be on I&E account as a loss as this is the market value.

MH took members through her report and explained the variances in the position to the end of September, then the forecast position and the strong free reserve position.

JC asked where and when it would show if we used reserves to supplement income and expenditure.

MH explained this would show as notes and comments to the accounts, and in the reserves in June

BF asked if the cost of legal advice on elections should be added. MH advised we now have the invoices, so this will change the forecast.

Outstanding Drainage Rates:

This stands £39,110 on 08/10/2025. This is more than last year, which is a cause for concern as some ratepayers are withholding due to EA maintenance not happening.

A Magistrate will not consider another public body's decision to be a reason for non-payment of rates.

JC asked what the usual outcome is where we take to court.

MH confirmed that the majority pay and the bailiffs are persistent. About 75% is recovered but the message is equally important. If bailiffs can't find a person, we can ask the Magistrate to issue an arrest warrant.

BF asked about the bailiff fee and capacity. MH confirmed the Bailiff charges the ratepayer direct for their costs unless we instruct them in error. They will target top debtors first and are able to cope with the volume we give them.

JC asked if any of these debtors have previously been taken to court, and if they can attend court to make their case.

MH advised this is the case for one as they claim to be vulnerable. We won't pursue but will look to attach the debt to the land instead. MH also confirmed that 2 debtors attended last year to give their side.

DT asked if the outstanding amount is a rolling figure not in year. MH confirmed it includes debt from previous years and is a total amount outstanding to the Board.

BF asked if we take people to court who have a payment plan in place. MH confirmed the figure includes these, but we will not take to court anyone who has a payment plan in place. We are happy to put these plans in place.

The Axe Brue IDB Finance and Works committee recommends to Full Board that the level for taking Drainage Rate debtor to court to be £100 as seen fit by the RFO.

Proposed: Jon Cousins

Seconded: David Tratt

All in favour

in 2019 the Board voted for 2 staff members to take debtors to court, which has now become a single point of failure. She asked the

**RESOLUTION
03**

	<p>Committee to recommend to the Board that 2 additional members of staff can do this.</p> <p>The Axe Brue IDB Finance and Works committee recommends to Full Board that the Governance Officer, Responsible Finance Officer and Clerk be given authority to instigate proceedings for the recovery of arrears of drainage rates and that the Chairman sign and seal a certificate to confirm this. Proposed: Jon Cousins Seconded: Bob Filmer All in favour.</p> <p>MH then provided an update on current investments. Very little remains in the current account and most is in the 95 day and deposit accounts and earning well. BF asked if we need to maintain this amount in the deposit account. MH confirmed that we don't but still have the remainder of the EA precept to pay and some maintenance invoices.</p> <p>JC observed how excellent it is to receive budget monitoring reports that are easy to follow. The Chair echoed with his thanks.</p>	<p>RESOLUTION 04</p>
<p>9. IDB Funding for EA Main River Maintenance</p>	<p>The current position is that no provision has been made. All our efforts this year have been focused on engaging with the agency and working with ADA/SWADA. ADA Branch Chairs are meeting on 29 October which will be followed by a meeting with Minister Hardy in Lincolnshire on 30 October. IDS and the SDBC Chair have been invited to attend both. The EA have provided costs for contracts to carry out SRA works and have confirmed that they could now only carry out half of what was proposed for routine ditch works. There is concern that EA pricing will affect costs for others. The Chair asked if we know how many riparian owners have been contacted. IDS is unsure but we have written to all ratepayers. We have also challenged the EA; they have responded and will not change their position but have invited the IDB's to assess the impact. A further response has been drafted which will go this week, to say we can assist but will not carry out the assessment. DT commented that the Mark Yeo has been done as far as Rooksbridge. Water further on to Whitehouse will be restricted and considerable lengths of the watercourse are overgrown. BF asked if part of discussion with the Government is that IDB's do the work better and cheaper. IDS explained that our problem is capacity and funding.</p>	
<p>10. Any Other Business</p>	<p>DT observed that budget setting for the Consortium will start again. He feels in the past we have had to restrict what can do as a Board following this and setting a zero per cent budget for things like the Water Level Management Plan to stay within recommended increases. IDS understands this but the principle of trying to sit within the cap allowable by the levying authority is something we have tried to do. DT would like to understand the constraints. MH noted there are Axe Brue Board members on the SDBC Management Committee. We set the Consortium budget before as the Axe Brue budget is based on the assumption that this is the charge from the Consortium. If it costs more to continue work, the Board needs to</p>	

	<p>decide whether to charge more to the Council and Drainage rate payers or do less work. The Board needs to decide what it wants to do, see what it costs and then change its mind if the members feel that the budget increase is too high.</p> <p>IDS noted another option could be to work out costs from the bottom up, then put cap on. We currently prioritise works. There is a suggestion to do EA work via a PSCA which would require local funding and would require a split between the ratepayer and special levy.</p> <p>We could calculate the cost of doing the work ourselves from reserves, but he is not sure it would be realistic.</p> <p>IDS we have been catching up and not raised funds for board schemes. We will either have a zero-capital programme or will need to raise £200k to be funded from reserves or by charging.</p> <p>JC asked if we have a cap on rates.</p> <p>MH advised there is no cap. The special levy is a demand and has to be paid. If we increased it, the Councils would need to account for this elsewhere.</p> <p>IDS reflected on previous difficulties in Sedgemoor. He feels we have to work collaboratively with our partner organisations.</p> <p>MH is already in conversation with Somerset Council but is still awaiting to hear the EA precept increase.</p> <p>JC asked if we could step an increase over a number of years. MH advised this is possible, and has been done in NSLIDB. It will be affected by legislative changes and other changing/unknown costs.</p> <p>BF noted that Somerset Council is struggling financially and have been devolving costs to parishes and towns. If we chose an increase it could be blamed on the IDB.</p> <p>JC noted that if there is flooding, it is not just ratepayers who suffer. He asked if Parish Councils can add £1 per property to the Parish Precept. IDS felt this is too similar to the SRA contribution via Council Tax.</p> <p>BF wondered if would be simpler to raise via SRA. IDS explained this can't be done. This is capped.</p> <p>DT also noted the potential of charging non IDB areas to raise funding.</p>	
<p>11. Date of Next Meeting</p>	<p>Full Board Meeting Mon 3 November at 10.30 Finance & Works Mon 12 January 2026 at 10.30 Consortium Office Charity Day: Thurs 6 November 2025, in aid of The Royal British Legion. All welcome. IDS read out the names of the newly elected Board members following the Election. The meeting closed at 12.44</p>	

**ANNEX A TO
AXE BRUE F&W COMMITTEE MINUTES
DATED 20 OCTOBER 2025**

AXE BRUE F&W MEETING – TABLE OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

Action Number:	Action:	Actionee:
AB/20251020 -01	Review/revise sample election nomination form	KC/IDS
AB/20251020 -02	Check with Ratings Officer if land opposite GRC has been identified as ag or special levy	MH
AB/20251020 -03	Officers to respond to the Auditors to note our disappointment so that it is on the record	MH