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14 October 2014

The Right Hon Elizabeth Truss
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Nobel House
Smith Square
London
SW1P 3JR

Sent on behalf of all Somerset Local Authorities

Dear Elizabeth

Future funding of the Somerset Rivers Authority

We write further to :

1. Our meeting on Friday 10 October 2014
2. A meeting I convened of the District Council Leaders on 13 October 2014

In our meeting on 10 October 2014, you advised us that the £2.7 million of interim funding that we had requested from DEFRA to initially fund the Somerset Rivers Authority would not be available.

Having spoken with the District Council Leaders, we are of the strong view that if the full £2.7 million one year, gap funding cannot be found by DEFRA (or any other Government department), then there can be no Somerset Rivers Authority.

This interim funding of £2.7 million is essentially to continue the vital flood prevention work through 2015/16, whilst the mechanism for permanent long term funding is agreed.

In relation to permanent funding, it is essential that primary legislation is passed to allow the creation of a Somerset Rivers Authority as a separate precepting authority and based on the understanding of your predecessor, this is the approach we have all been working towards over the past 9 months.

Owing to constraints on raising Council tax, funding of the Somerset Rivers Authority cannot be achieved by raising Council taxes without exceeding the referendum thresholds.

If we were to proceed with a referendum, then we believe it would have to be held in May 2015.

A separate, accountable and transparent Somerset Rivers Authority is the only way in which future flooding in Somerset can be tackled and alleviated. If the Somerset Rivers Authority does not have any powers or budget, then it cannot succeed.

You will recall in the middle of the Somerset flooding crisis, the Prime Minister kindly visited and stated that money would be no object, we cannot allow the flooding to happen again, and that no interdepartmental disputes in Whitehall would be allowed to interfere. Unless we receive interim funding and thereafter an ability to create a separate precepting authority, then all of the good work which we have achieved over the last nine months will count for very little.

The County and District Councils have been constructive and are exploring all options for future funding and we have not sought to lay all future funding requirements at Central Government's door.

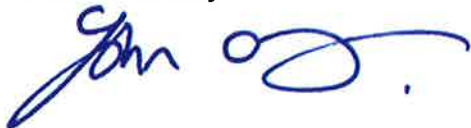
We would ask you to support us in honouring the Prime Minister's commitment by agreeing the interim funding requested and initiating primary legislation to create the Somerset Rivers Authority as a separate precepting authority.

For information we enclose a breakdown of the 2015/16 interim funding requirements which incidentally has gone up to £3 million, but we are prepared to accept £2.7 million.

You will note this letter has been signed by Local Authorities' Leaders in Somerset as this shows the collective strength of feeling.

We look forward to receiving a more positive response.

Yours sincerely




Cllr John Osman
Leader of Somerset County Council



Cllr Harvey Siggs
Leader of Mendip District Council



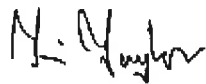
Cllr D McGinty
Leader of Sedgemoor District Council



Cllr Rick Pallister
Leader of South Somerset District Council



Cllr John Williams
Leader of Taunton Deane District Council



Cllr Tim Taylor
Leader of West Somerset District Council

CC David Cameron
Eric Pickles
District Council Leaders