

Southern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

Full Authority Meeting – 11th December 2025

A meeting of the Full Authority was held at 2pm on 11th December 2025 at The RNLI College, West Quay Road, Poole, Dorset, BH15 1NZ.

Present

Cllr. Paul Fuller	Isle of Wight Council (Chairman)
Cllr. Rob Hughes	Dorset Council (Vice Chairman)
Cllr. Kate Wheller	Dorset Council
Cllr. Crispin Goodall	BCP Council
Cllr. Peter Miles	BCP Council
Cllr. Lance Quantrill	Hampshire County Council
Cllr. Rod Cooper	Hampshire County Council
Cllr. Matthew Winnington	Portsmouth City Council
Dr Antony Jensen	MMO Appointee
Mr Richard Stride	MMO Appointee
Dr Heidi Guille	MMO Appointee
Dr Simon Cripps	MMO Appointee
Ms Elisabeth Bussey-Jones	MMO Appointee
Mr Gary Wordsworth	MMO Appointee
Dr Richard Morgan	Natural England
Mr Stuart Kingston-Turner	Environment Agency
Ms Rachel Irish	Marine Management Organisation
Ms Pia Bateman	Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
Mr Sam Dell	Principal Deputy Chief Officer (PDCO)
Dr Sarah Birchenough	Deputy Chief Officer (DCO)
Mrs Jennifer Carr	Chartered Accountant
Ms June Furlonger	Facilities & Administration Officer

Mr Rob Milton (incoming General Member) and Ms Louise MacCallum (Blue Marine Foundation) attended in the public gallery.

Apologies

30. Apologies for absence were received from Cllr. John Savage (Southampton City Council), Mr Neil Hornby (MMO Appointee), Mr Mark Cornwell (MMO Appointee) and Mr Colin Francis (MMO Appointee).

Declarations of Interest

31. The following non-pecuniary interests were declared: Dr Richard Morgan (Agenda Item 6b). Mr R Stride declared a pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 6b.

Minutes

32. Members considered the Minutes of the meeting held on the 18th September 2025.

The Executive Sub-Committee provided an update on Recommendation 15: that the Executive Sub-Committee had written to the AIFCA on behalf of the Authority requesting information on the use of Southern IFCA's subscriptions as well as clarity on the role and funding of the

Communications and Engagement Officer. It was outlined that further information on the AIFCA response was provided as Agenda Item K.

Members discussed the Local Authority Annual Reports and whether producing these provided benefit against resource requirements. The CEO outlined that the Local Authority Reports were created to provide a greater breakdown of Southern IFCA's delivery across the District to provide context to budgetary discussions and as a positive and helpful tool for coastal engagement by Officers. The CEO stated that the Local Authority Reports had been well received by the Local Authorities and were supporting community engagement. The Chairman stated that the reports were very useful for Local Authorities, particularly in a challenging financial climate and thanked the CEO and Officers for their work to provide information to the wider community.

Chairman's Announcements

33. The Chairman reflected on the Community Drop-In Surgeries held on the Isle of Wight and the positive opportunity provided to engage with the community and speak face to face with those working in local fisheries. The Chairman highlighted one of the issues raised being the costs associated with ferry travel to deliver catch to the mainland. The Chairman stated that the Community Drop-In Surgery initiative was providing great benefits for stakeholder engagement across the District.

The Chairman spoke on the appointment of Ms Emily Bulled as the new Communications and Engagement Officer at AIFCA, stating that it was hoped that this position would enable the profile of IFCA's to be raised nationally and that it was the intention to invite Ms E Bulled to a future meeting of the Full Authority.

Sub-Committees

34. Members received minutes of the Executive Sub-Committee held on 16th September 2025, the Technical Advisory Sub-Committee held on 21st August 2025 and an Extraordinary Meeting of the Technical Advisory Sub-Committee held on 20th October 2025.

PROGRESS REPORTS

Chief Executive Officer Updates

35. The CEO reflected that the last quarter had been a very busy time with two Extraordinary TAC Meetings to resolve workstreams for the Solent Scallop Fishery and the Black Seabream Review, noting that both these items would be covered in later Agenda Items. The CEO stated that both pressured timeframes for fisheries opening and the level of technical expertise required by the Team to deliver the work had increased pressures in delivery but that she was extremely proud of the Team for their delivery in recent weeks and across 2025 as a whole. The CEO also thanked the General Members for their flexibility in not just attending Extraordinary meetings but in preparing for these, reflecting that this work could not be achieved without their dedication and input.

The CEO informed Members that Southern IFCA have been recognised for a National Award, being awarded the MSC Ocean Leadership Award at the 2025 Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) UK Awards in November for Southern IFCA's innovative use of drones in the MSC Certified Poole Harbour Clam & Cockle Fishery. The CEO informed Members that the MSC had recognised that, by integrating drones into fisheries management back in 2022, Southern IFCA can ensure that Poole Harbour's Clam & Cockle Fishery continues to meet the highest sustainability standards set by the MSC. The CEO quoted the MSC '*The prestigious national award recognises Southern IFCA's commitment to sustainable fishing and leadership in advancing conservation and the future of our seas. It provides a blueprint for well-managed fisheries worldwide*', stating that the fishery and Authority should be proud of this achievement, building on years of governance in this fishery. The CEO stated that she and PDCO Dell had collected the award on behalf of Officers and Members at the ceremony in Edinburgh, reflecting in the acceptance speech on the hard work, collaboration and innovation shown by everyone

involved in the fishery, as represented by the Poole & District Fishermen's Association and how innovative and carefully considered fisheries management can support both conservation and communities alike. The CEO reflected that the decisions made by the Authority, both technical and budgetary, facilitate Southern IFCA's ongoing delivery of function and that this is recognition of this work at a national level.

The CEO informed Members that there had been recent confirmation of Southern IFCA receiving the remaining £80k of funding from Defra for the current Financial year, the first £50k having been received towards the beginning of the Financial Year. The CEO outlined that this is the last year that Defra have committed to provide funding for Fisheries Management Plan (FMP), Marine Protected Area (MPA) and Marine Consents work. The CEO stated that year on year, due to uncertainty in timing and lack of confidence in receipt that a buffer has been maintained in reserves to honour existing Project Officer contracts in the event that Defra funding during the agreed period had not been forthcoming. The CEO stated that this year there has been a reduction in this funding from £150k to £130k which is out of Southern IFCA's control.

The CEO continued in relation to Defra funding, outlining that in recent weeks, the Spending Review 2026-2029 submission, prepared jointly by the Chief Officers Group and the AIFCA, had been submitted, setting out the funding requirements for IFCAs to meet their statutory duties and deliver national fisheries and environmental policy effectively over the period 2026/27 to 2028/29. The CEO informed Members that the bid was annexed in Agenda Item K and makes a strong evidence-based case for restoring real-term funding levels, investing in digital systems, strengthening the capacity for FMP and MPA delivery, and modernising vessels and equipment. The CEO outlined that Defra will now consider this as part of its wider departmental Spending Review process and that decisions by HM Treasury are expected in late 2025, with allocations to be confirmed in early 2026. The CEO stated it was unlikely that the IFCAs would hear the outcomes of this process before autumn 2026. The CEO outlined key points from the submission and stated that whilst remaining optimistic, there is an awareness of government departments needing to find savings. Similar bids have been made in the past and there has not been a change to the IFCA funding model to date, noting that the AIFCA are doing an excellent job to maintain communication with Defra in relation to this work.

The CEO spoke on Members governance, noting that Mr Neil Hornby (MMO Appointee) would return at the February TAC meeting following a secondment to CEO of the Rural Payments Agency from Cefas. Mr N Hornby has extended his tenure as a General Member. The CEO reflected on the meeting being the last Authority meeting for General Member Mr Gary Wordsworth, and that Mr Rob Milton would be joining the Authority as a General Member in the New Year. Mr R Milton is the Farm Manager for Othniel Oysters, working alongside Mr G Wordsworth for many years. The CEO thanked Mr Wordsworth for his service to the Authority, this was echoed by the Members. The CEO outlined that Members Annual Appraisals forms would shortly be sent to the MMO and thanked all Members for considering and approving comments.

The CEO informed Members that the Community Drop-In Surgery held on the Isle of Wight had been very productive, with the CEO and PDCO joined by Dr A Jensen as Chairman of the Technical Advisory Sub-Committee and Cllr. P Fuller as Chairman of the Authority. Visits were made to Yarmouth, Freshwater, Ventnor and Bembridge and received an excellent turnout. Matters raised by industry included the Solent Scallop Fishery, with early indications appearing positive in relation to stock availability, the impact of recreational sea angling on bass fisheries in the Solent, transport challenges associated with getting fish to market, which is a particular challenge for fishers on the Isle of Wight, general concerns regarding lack of opportunity and diversification in what is perceived as a dying industry, fishers in Ventnor hoping to see changes in tuna fishery opportunities from Defra and the reality of climate change on fish stocks, particularly crab.

The CEO commented that Southern IFCA is now approaching the end of the first cycle of Community Drop-In Surgeries, with a penultimate session planned for Poole and Mudeford and

the final Surgeries taking place in Warsash and Portsmouth, both of which will be timetabled before the end of the Financial Year. The CEO encouraged Elected Members to get involved with the initiative, with Cllrs from the upcoming Surgery areas welcome to attend and get a sense of the work that is done amongst constituents. The CEO outlined that a report following the programme will subsequently be brought to the Authority.

The CEO expressed thanks to Cllr. C Goodall for an invite to attend a BCP Council meeting, specifically the Environment and Overview Scrutiny Board, to present on the IFCA function, focussing on work achieved in the BCP area on behalf of the Council. This builds on an initiative shared at the previous Authority meeting, routed in challenging levy discussions, to assist in providing Elected Members with more information on the IFCA's function within their respective remits, as a statutory service provider delivering on the Councils' behalf. The CEO stated that following the December 2024 meeting, methods of demonstrating clearly how Southern IFCA are delivering specific to each Local Authority had been explored, with a report on the outcome of this work and the resulting Local Authority Reports delivered at the September Authority meeting where the initiative was well received. Following this meeting the Local Authority Reports were sent to each of the relevant Council leads, Council Financial Officers and other relevant persons, with the CEO taking the opportunity to seek invites to each of the Councils or relevant committees to discuss the work of the IFCA further. The CEO outlined that copies of the relevant Local Authority Report had been made available for each Elected Members at this meeting.

The CEO informed Members that a revised Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) had recently been introduced by Government, noting that the 2023 revision had required a realignment of some work streams to ensure that Southern IFCA was delivery MPA management for the District in a timely fashion to support Government with 30x30 objectives. The CEO outlined that the EIP 2025 would be considered in terms of impact on strategic delivery in line with the drafting of the Annual Strategy for 2026-2027.

The CEO outlined that Defra are running several workshops focussing on the Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund, inviting input on how this fund couple be spent running up to the 2030 Financial Year. Anyone interested in attending can sign up via the Defra website. As outlined in the recent budget in Westminster, allocation of funding will not commence until 2026-2027 with an initial £25m spend from the fund. The overall fund is set at £360m with a purpose to support the UK fishing industry and coastal communities via investment in fleet modernisation, skills and training, community infrastructure and boosting seafood exports and trade. Defra are keen to get wider ranging stakeholder input into this process.

Cllr. R Hughes queried how many IFCAs are using drone technology, PDCO Dell outlined that 5 IFCAs are currently using drones with Southern IFCA the second to introduce the use of this technology. Members expressed that they were pleased Southern IFCA had been recognised for an award and thanked those involved in carrying out the work. Dr S Cripps raised that the Poole Harbour Clam & Cockle Fishery had been a very high scoring fishery under the MSC Standard which was very positive.

Mr R Stride informed Members that for engagement on the Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund there were meetings planned in Mudeford and Poole in the coming week.

Cllr. K Wheller commented that Southern IFCA and IFCAs in general are doing very good work, along with the relevant businesses along the coast but that this is not widely known and that any methods for further promoting this work would be very beneficial and enable a wider understanding by more elements of the community. The Chairman reflected that the appointment of Ms E Bulled at AIFCA should assist with this and support all the work that Southern IFCA is already doing to try and promote the good work being done in fisheries along the coast. Members discussed positive outputs from communications that were already being developed by AIFCA. The Chairman encouraged all Elected Members to promote the work of Southern IFCA.

Black Seabream Management Package

36. DCO Birchenough provided an update to Members on the development of the Black Seabream Management Package which collectively seeks to demonstrate how Southern IFCA are achieving two parallel Policy Objectives to fulfil legal duties in relation to three Dorset Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) to support sustainable fisheries for black seabream.

DCO Birchenough outlined that, in developing Southern IFCA's understanding of the brief to inform decision making for black seabream management in the three Dorset MCZs, encompassing the route of designation, the relevant Conservation Objectives (COs) and exploring early stages of policy development, founded upon the requirements under Section (154) of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, the Black Seabream review was split into two parallel streams of work, each having independent Policy Objectives and legislative underpinnings.

DCO Birchenough gave an overview of each Policy Objective and how each had been satisfied, the Primary Policy Objective through a combination of existing statutory measures and the Secondary Policy Objective through the Co-Developed Principles, which were co-developed with the Dorset Community, and underpinned by a series of Policy Drivers and Headline Objectives. DCO Birchenough outlined the Co-Developed Principles and how they would be applied and gave Members an overview of the policy and supporting documents which underpinned the development of the Black Seabream Management Package.

DCO Birchenough informed Members that the Technical Advisory Sub-Committee had considered recommendations relating to the delivery of the Primary and Secondary Policy Objectives at an Extraordinary Meeting on the TAC on 4th December 2025 and had resolved that Southern IFCA's duties under Section (154) of MaCAA to further the Conservation Objectives for black seabream in the three Dorset MCZs had been met through a combination of existing statutory measures and to introduce the Co-Developed Principles from 1st April 2026 to improve understandings of black seabream across the three Dorset MCZs and complement statutory measures.

DCO Birchenough stated that the year 1 delivery of the Co-Developed Principles would focus on engagement, raising awareness and seeking compliance. Southern IFCA recognises that BSB fisheries are data poor, as such an adaptive management approach, as facilitated under the Secondary Policy Objective, allows Southern IFCA to robustly respond to BAE in a timely way to ensure the future sustainability of the fisheries in Dorset. DCO Birchenough outlined that a defined review process is set out in the policy document; Process Document 3 – Management Tools, Application & Review and it is intended that the first annual review be commenced post 31st July 2026 in line with the defined process. The Policy and supporting documentation under the Black Seabream Management Package will be made available via the Southern IFCA website.

DCO Birchenough expressed thanks to the Dorset Community for their support and participation in the co-development of management under the Secondary Policy Objective noting the level of engagement and expertise provided across all sectors had been instrumental in shaping appropriate and proportionate management for sustainable black seabream fisheries.

Solent Scallop Fishery

37. PDCO Dell informed Members that following a review of management for the Solent Scallop Fishery under the Solent Dredge Permit Byelaw Category A Permits, the Technical Advisory Sub-Committee had resolved, at an Extraordinary Meeting of the TAC on 20th October 2025, to reduce the daily time period during which Permit Holders are permitted to fish for scallop by two hours, from 08:00-16:00 to 08:00-14:00.

PDCO Dell stated that Officers had been working hard operationally to ensure engage with Permit Holders and ensure compliance with the change in permit conditions and with other

regulations within that fishery. PDCO Dell outlined that, as of 7th December 2025, the Team had carried out 15 patrols with a low level of non-compliance being addressed.

PDCO Dell informed Members that since the opening of the fishery on 1st November 2025, Officers have observed good catches of scallops being caught and landed by Permit Holder, including one under 10m vessel observed landing just short of 1 tonne of scallop in the first week. PDCO Dell outlined that catch return data will be analysed for the first month of the season following the submission date on 14th December 2025.

PDCO Dell stated that the industry on the whole has been receptive to the changes made by the Authority in the management of this fishery. PDCO Dell commented that he had been out on FPV Vigilant and had engaged with five Permit Holders directly, discussing the economic importance of the fishery. He commented that it was very positive to see an active inshore fleet and busy local ports as a result of the fishery opening.

Dr S Cripps queried how the change in permit conditions had been received by permitted fishers. It was discussed that overall, the majority of permit holders had received the change well and understood the Authority's rationale for intervention. It was discussed that some permit holders have raised concerns but that this is not uncommon when changes to management are introduced but that there have been positive outputs seen at the start of the 2025/26 fishing season and coastal engagement in this fishery has been largely positive.

Cllr M Winnington stated that it was encouraging that the positive engagement seen through the consultation on changes to management was continuing as the fishing season opened and emphasised the importance of appropriate management to allow for sustainable fisheries. The Chairman echoed this, stating that consultation with the fishing industry and understanding how they wish to input into consultations is a key element of management development, and encouraged Councillors on the Authority to be involved with this process where possible.

Budget Control Statement to September 2025

38. The CEO confirmed that the BCS captured the period 1st April to 30th September 2025, and that the accompanying paperwork provided a summary of major budget headers as well as more detailed notes to provide an understanding of all positive and negative variance equal to or greater than 1k.

The CEO summarised that the BCS shows a deficit of c.56k, and the annex to the report summarises the narrative of positive or negative variance greater than 1k in addition to contextual notes. The CEO outlined that there is a positive variance in all Major Budget Headers, the deficit arising from awaiting provision of funding from Defra for delivering project works on their behalf.

The CEO provided a summary of the Major Budget Headers, outlining that the positive variance captured under the Compliance and Enforcement Header (c.20k) represents c.6k of savings on FPV fuel and c.2k maintenance costs, relating to operational prioritisation during the two quarters, seeing increased use of the drone and FPV Endeavour to align with the PHDP season. This is likely to even out over the course of the FY. The CEO outlined that PPE cost savings (c.3k) are also likely to even out during the FY. A c.2k payment to the MMO for access to a National Intelligence System (CLUE) is anticipated imminently. The CEO stated that at this stage of the FY, c.5k of savings are seen under the Prosecutions header, with these costs being unpredictable and likely to even out over the course of the FY.

The CEO outlined that the positive variance captured under the Research & Policy Header (c.14k) relates mainly to no costs being incurred to date for Byelaw advertisement or legal support (c.5.5k) and c.2k for the Drift Net Project, costs which may be incurred later in the FY, subject to community uptake. The CEO outlined that c.1k is being held prior to reserve transfer for monies received from PHDP holders for costs associated with the offset of MSC Certification

fees for the fishery (to reimburse monies that were paid upfront by Southern IFCA previously). The CEO stated that money (c.2k) ringfenced for Solent Scallop Research remains dependent on another IFCA providing training and that an invoice for works associated with the Solent Bivalve stock assessment are pending (c.2k).

The CEO discussed the positive variance captured under the Business Services Header (c.32k) being due to a reduction in staff salary and pension contributions (c.15k) as a result of one IFCO embarking on a sabbatical for the first four months of the FY, as well as the resignation of the Office Manager in June 2025 and Senior Research & Policy IFCO in August. The CEO stated that costs associated with staff training (c.16k) will be realised later in the year (Q4) and that increased and unforeseen costs associated with insurance premiums across the entirety of the business (c.4k) have been incurred as a reflection of increased costs for services.

The CEO outlined that the positive variance under the Capital Equipment Header (c.15k) is due to savings in depreciation on FPV Protector, with the FPV budgeted to be replaced in Q1 with a cost of £120k resulting in higher depreciation in the budget. The CEO stated that this replacement has been delayed, initially due to delays experienced in delivery of FPV Vigilant and the undertaking of an operational needs analysis, plus, more recently in order to await the outcomes of the 2026-2029 AIFCA Spending Review bid.

The CEO summarised that the deficit in projected income of c.137k reflects the outstanding payment of project funding from Defra, c.90k, in addition to c.50k which relates to the potential sale of FPV Protector, budgeted for prior to experiencing delays in procurement and delivery of FPV Vigilant. The CEO outlined that the sale may not be completed in the current FY. The CEO stated that an amount c.4.5k relates to the anticipated issuing of commercial and recreational permits under the Pot Fishing Byelaw, the Byelaw remaining with the MMO quality assurance team. The CEO stated that the delay is likely due to the national delivery of FMPs and Tranche 1 outcomes. In addition, the BCP Shellfish Sampling contract (c.3.5k) will be realised later in the FY.

Cllr. K Wheller thanked the CEO and Mrs Jennifer Carr for their efficient management of a small budget and that considering all the work delivered by Southern IFCA the deficit could be larger if the budget was not managed as well. Cllr. R Hughes seconded this and added his thanks.

ITEMS FOR DECISION

Budget Forecast 2026-2027

39. The CEO outlined that the budget forecast is designed to enable the delivery of Southern IFCA's statutory functions in accordance with relevant legislation including the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, the Conservation Regulations, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and The Poole Harbour Fishery Order 2015 to manage aquaculture in Poole Harbour.

The CEO directed Members to Annex 1 to the report, the Background to Budget Forecasting 2026-2027 which details each of the budget setting components, the key areas of work that Southern IFCA are required to deliver in the coming year. In addition, unknown variables are detailed which have been considered when presenting the budget forecast, details of cost savings which are being taken into the next Financial Year and details of the Reserves and how these will be used in the coming Financial Year.

The CEO stated that a key point is that no new works or projects are proposed for the coming Financial Year. The budget presented considers costs associated with maintaining delivery of Southern IFCA's function only.

The CEO provided details of each of the primary elements that informed the budget setting, across Research & Policy functions, Compliance & Enforcement functions and Business Services functions.

For Research & Policy, the proposed budget enables the continued collection of data and undertaking of surveys under the annual monitoring programme to ensure that best available evidence continues to be used to inform the development of and review of management to ensure management remains fit for purpose. This function also includes the delivery of MPA management in accordance with Government targets, anticipating work in 2026-2027 on the annual review of Black Seabream Co-Developed Principles and annual reviews under relevant permit byelaws.

For Compliance & Enforcement there is a need to deliver ongoing compliance and enforcement functions across 24 byelaws and 7 codes of practice plus the addition of ensuring compliance with the Black Seabream Co-Developed Principles and the pending Shore Gathering Byelaw and Pot Fishing Byelaw at the point of ratification. This function also includes the delivery of a compliance and enforcement function of all other relevant legislation to ensure protection and enhancement of fisheries and the marine environment, supporting delivery partners such as the MMO where applicable. The function captures ongoing costs associated with operational assets, staff training and PPE as well as maintaining fiscal capacity to progress prosecutions of fisheries offences in accordance with the Compliance & Enforcement Framework and capability with national systems such as CLUE.

For Business Services, the function covers the maintaining of core permanent staffing levels in accordance with the 2025/26 footprint and providing pay increases to all employees in accordance with the NJC Pay Award, as set out in employee contracts. This function includes a need to maintain the office environment, ensuring adequate insurances are in place across the business, vehicle fleet management, ongoing scrutiny of public money via appropriate governance channels including accountant services and external financial auditing costs and annual subscription to the AIFCA, recognising the essential role it fulfils as an umbrella body to the 10 IFCA's in a national capacity. In addition, the function recognises the growing demands associated with responding to GDPR requests within recognised legislative timeframes.

The CEO emphasised that these primary elements represent the Southern IFCA's core functions and are taskings which simply allow Southern IFCA to provide its statutory delivery. The CEO outlined that if Southern IFCA are unable to fund any of these primary elements, then there would be an impact to the ability for Southern IFCA to deliver its legal functions.

The CEO outlined that the core functions had been split out from additional functions, the former being Local Authority funded, the latter being funded by Defra and that these additional functions do not have any impact or bearing on the Local Authority levy. The CEO stated that Local Authorities are legally required to fund the delivery of Southern IFCA's core functions and defray costs, with Southern IFCA being a service provider to the Local Authorities.

The CEO detailed unknown variables including the level of levy contributions and the outcomes of the Defra 2026-2029 Spending Review bid, which will not be known until autumn 2026, noting that the current IFCA funding model has been fixed since 2011 and has not recognised inflation or increasing demands on IFCA's during this time. The third unknown variable is the rate of inflation, expected to settle at around 2% towards the end of the 2026/27 Financial Year, noting that inflation has not been considered in the budget setting and the final figures presented in the forecast do not consider the rising costs of services.

The CEO outlined the funding pots that Southern IFCA can draw from, including the annual levies and the reserves, with the intended use of the reserves for 2026/27 mapped out. The CEO stated that the General Reserve, which is the reserve not linked to specific projects/works, is anticipated to reduce by nearly half when comparing year end 24/25 to anticipated year end 26/27. The CEO stated that the reserves are well managed through a robust Reserves Policy to ensure maintained viability but that the reserves are actively needing to be used to fund business as usual in addition to seeking levy increases from the Local Authorities.

The CEO outlined that, prior to inflationary projections, assuming a standstill (0%) in levy contributions, the budget forecast anticipates a loss of c.£323k for the Financial Year 2026-2027.

The CEO discussed the savings that are projected to be achieved, including through staff salaries and associated costs by holding the position of a Senior IFCO in the Research & Policy Team and a vacancy in the position for an Office Manager. Projected savings are also expected due to delaying the sale of FPV Protector and associated depreciation and also greater budget accuracy based on actuals rather than projections for FPV Vigilant. Combined savings equate to c.66k.

In order to meet the costs associated with operations, and to meet Southern IFCA's statutory duties, recognising the extreme financial pressures that the Local Authorities are under and anticipating a future position from Defra on potential changes to the IFCA funding model, to reduce the anticipated deficit, the CEO outlined that it is proposed that c.£277k of the deficit is met by the Southern IFCA reserves, the majority of which is sourced from the remaining Defra funding pot, a possibility due to responsible management of this funding over time.

The CEO outlined therefore that, prior to inflationary projections, assuming a standstill (0%) in levy contributions, and following the reserve adjustments, the budget forecast anticipates a loss of c.£45k for the Financial Year 2026-2027.

The CEO advised Members that the budget forecast was not extravagant, in the fact that Southern IFCA were not seeking to look at introducing new projects, nor to employ new members of staff and increase our footprint or procure new assets. Rather simply trying to ensure we can maintain delivery of our statutory function and in doing so trying to offset some of our growing costs associated with the fragile economic climate, making small financial gains where possible, recognising economies of scale.

Cllr. M Winnington thanked the CEO and Ms Jennifer Carr for putting the budget forecast together. Cllr. Winnington commented on the concern associated with needing to use reserves to support continued delivery on statutory function and that the Government were not recognising the need for increased funding to support this delivery. Cllr. Winnington stated that prudent management by Southern IFCA had enabled the proposed budget forecast and continued delivery of function but that this could not be maintained in the long term without increased funding support from Government, recognising the complexity of the marine environment in which Southern IFCA operates. Cllr. Winnington stated that the budget forecast should be endorsed by Members.

Cllr. R Cooper recognised the good work delivered by Southern IFCA. Cllr. Cooper stated that following discussion with the Executive Portfolio Holder and Council Officers, whether it was an appropriate time for the Southern IFCA to be subject to an external peer review to determine if there any changes that could be made to save further costs. Cllr. Cooper reflected on the difficult financial position for all councils and that Hampshire Council had undergone this process. The CEO stated that all IFCAs are independently reviewed by Defra every four years. Cllr. Cooper suggested that a commercial body may be able to offer additional advice in this regard.

Members discussed this point, noting that there would be a cost implication for such a service and also that in the determination that Southern IFCA was currently operating well and prudently in its delivery and financial management it would be difficult for an outside body to provide any further input. It was discussed that Southern IFCA also have built in peer review processes within the organisation in terms of technical output through partner organisations including the MMO, NE and the EA.

Cllr. K Wheller encouraged Elected Members to approach relevant coastal MPs and asking for support for Southern IFCA in lobbying the relevant department of Government to emphasise the need for appropriate funding.

Cllr. R Hughes commented on the use of the General Reserve to help meet the projected deficit and the concerns over whether the Southern IFCA could respond in an emerging situation, for example if a new patrol vessel was unexpectedly needed to support function, which may not be possible if the General Reserve is diluted too much.

Dr S Cripps commented on Southern IFCA's operational delivery being efficient and effective for fisheries which are important locally but also at regional and national scales such as bivalve production and raised concerns over limiting the ability to mitigate risk if reserves are reduced. Dr Cripps also reflected on the importance of the compliance and enforcement function and that effective enforcement in the marine environment is also intrinsically linked to the terrestrial environment. Dr Cripps further commented on the importance of food security and that this only comes from appropriate management within the marine sector and finally, detailed figures relating to rates increases for Hampshire Council and resulting budgets which suggested that financial support is available but that it comes down to whether councils support the delivery by Southern IFCA as a priority financially alongside all other priority services. Cllr R. Cooper provided further detail in relation to the rates increase and how this had to be spent within Hampshire Council, noting that Hampshire Council is needing to use reserves to ensure a balanced budget for 2026-2027 and that savings are being sought each year.

Ms E Bussey-Jones supported that the budget forecast showed prudent and responsible financial management which has already considered cost savings and how delivery can be maintained.

Cllr. P Fuller proposed the recommendation, seconded by Cllr. R Hughes. Fifteen Members voted in favour, Cllr. R Cooper and Cllr. L Quantrill abstained.

Resolved

40. That Members of the Authority approve the principles informing the Budget Forecast for the Financial Year 1st April 2026 to 31st March 2027.

Levy Contributions 2026-2027

41. The CEO outlined that, in accordance with the Agenda Item report, a levy increase is being sought for the 2026-2027 Financial Year of 5.04%.

The CEO stated that the proposed increase is not an inflationary adjustment but a targeted and well-considered proposal which has been carefully considered over time and is put forward to address the operational deficit, namely the Southern IFCA's ability to deliver its statutory function across inshore fisheries and conservation for the constituent councils to which Southern IFCA provide a service on their behalf.

The CEO referenced the discussion under the previous Agenda Item, reminding Members that the budget forecast does not include inflationary adjustments and that, if it did, the deficit would be greater. The CEO outlined financial pressures that Southern IFCA are facing outside of inflation, including reduced revenue levels, specifically the loss of Defra project funding, and sustained service demands and that as a result Southern IFCA are operating with a deficit that cannot responsibly be carried forward.

The CEO reminded Members of the proposal to reduce the deficit using reserves, reducing the deficit by 86% to £45k which correlates with the recommendation to increase the levy contributions by 5.04%, representing the minimum amount necessary to restore a degree of balance to the budget. The CEO outlined the financial analysis had shown that anything less would impact the Southern IFCA's ability to deliver statutory obligations and would require reductions over time that would compromise service quality and long-term sustainability.

The CEO detailed that steps had been taken to control costs and increase efficiencies, a process which has been ongoing for several years as reported annually, and that for the Financial Year 2026-2027 combined savings across all major budget headers equated to c.£66k. These measures alone are not sufficient to address the deficit, and the proposed levy increase is about stabilising Southern IFCA's budget, not expanding it or adjusting for inflation, to ensure that the organisation can continue to operate sustainably.

The CEO informed Members that due to the size of the organisation there is limited resilience and Southern IFCA are being as cost effective as possible. The CEO reflected that the current staff footprint is smaller than that required and that, in the absence of the key roles of an Office Manager and Senior IFCO for Research & Policy, there are pressures on the staff body to address additional tasks which is not sustainable. In addition, a legacy plumbing issue in the Office remains ongoing since the procurement of the office and impacts facilities availability for stakeholders and Members, noting that this was not included in the budget forecast but will be taken from reserves, demonstrating Southern IFCA is continuing to actively draw on reserves to maintain function. The CEO stated that operationally, two key asset replacements have been put on hold, the replacement of FPV Protector and the replacement of the drone, both of which will be maintained.

The CEO outlined that in-year, challenging decisions are needing to be made, communicated through a risk evaluation to the Executive Sub-Committee, to seek to minimise the cost of running the organisation and balancing that with the need to ensure delivery. This process is reducing the level of financial impact that Local Authorities are seeing through the levy setting. The CEO stated that the proposed levy increase has been carefully considered with all other options to reduce the figure exhausted, the 5.04% takes into account the financial health of the constituent Local Authorities and represents a fair and collectively responsible approach which is not excessive and, if not addressed, risks compounded effects and increased challenges in the coming years, that will impact service delivery and the communities Southern IFCA serve.

The CEO stated that as Southern IFCA are delivering a service on behalf of the Local Authorities, an inability to deliver that service means that the Local Authorities are also not delivering statutory functions. The CEO described the breakdown of £45k between the six Local Authorities, ranging from a £2k increase for Southampton Council to £18k for Hampshire Council, and provided further detail on the associated monthly and daily cost breakdowns, relating these to the relevant Local Authorities wider budgets. The CEO requested that Elected Members consider the proposed levy increase.

Cllr. C Goodall commented that the Authority should not allow for the situation to become worse as the ability to recover becomes harder. Cllr. Goodall also commented that the fishing industry, which brings revenue into the local Council areas, should not be impacted and on that basis would support the proposed increase.

Cllr. R Cooper stated that he would be unable to support an increase of 5.04%, stating that Hampshire Council is in a difficult financial situation and that the maximum that could be supported would be a 2% increase.

The Chairman asked what the implications would be on a 2% increase for delivery of function and the reserves. The CEO outlined that a 2% increase would be an additional £18k across the six Local Authorities, which would not cover the deficit and would require considerations related to the staff footprint and also a decrease in patrol capacity across the District. The Chairman commented that this would mean the Southern IFCA would struggle to fulfil its statutory duties.

Cllr. M Winnington stated that he supported a 5.04% increase on the basis that IFCA's are suffering from a lack of support in delivery of services from Government due to inadequate funding, and that this means alternative sources of funding are required to be used. In considering delivery of statutory functions on behalf of the Local Authorities, Cllr. Winnington

expressed that it was right that the Local Authorities support the IFCA and encouraged other Elected Members from Hampshire Council to support the proposed increase.

Cllr. R Hughes commented that Dorset Council would support the proposed increase of 5.04% due to the limited impact on a cost per day basis and the requirements to support the delivery of this statutory work, with Government providing funds to the Local Authorities for this purpose. Cllr. Hughes commented that a proposal for a larger increase should be on the table rather than using the reserves, which Dorset Council would also support.

Cllr. P Miles thanked the CEO and Ms Jennifer Carr for their prudent financial management and stated he would support the increase of 5.04% as the funds are being well spent.

Cllr P. Fuller invited Members to consider the first recommendation of a 5.04% increase on levy payments. Cllr. R Hughes proposed the increase, which was seconded by Cllr. P Miles. Cllr P. Fuller, Cllr. K Wheller, Cllr. Crispin Goodall and Cllr. M Winnington were in favour. Cllr. R Cooper and Cllr. L Quantrill voted against the proposal. As the majority voted for the increase, the proposal stood.

Resolved

42. That Elected Members of the Authority approve that Southern IFCA's six constituent Local Authorities are levied for the Financial Year 1st April 2026 to 31st March 2027, at a rate of 5.04%, which equates to an increase of c.45k, split between the 6 x Local Authorities in accordance with a prescribed formula.

GUEST SPEAKER:

Solent Seascapes project Update

43. Ms Louise MacCallum, Solent Project Manager at Blue Marine Foundation, presented to Members on The Solent Seascapes Project, a collaborative long-term initiative working to restore multiple habitats across the Solent strait as a diverse estuarine system. Ms MacCallum presented on the five key aims of the Solent Seascape Project and how actions are being delivered under each, including seeking to actively restore four key habitats to revive a functioning, thriving and abundant Solent seascape: seagrass, saltmarsh, seabird nesting sites and oyster reefs. Ms MacCallum outlined how the community were playing a role in the delivery of this project and highlighted particular initiatives such as Songs from the Solent, which is the development of a new album by Grammy-nominated singer and songwriter Richard Walters as part of his Artist Residency with the project. Songs from the Solent is a unique musical celebration of the region's habitats, wildlife and communities, inspired by the environments the project is working to protect and will be available to download soon. Ms MacCallum reflected on the good work that the project has achieved to date and provided an overview of upcoming works.

More information on the Solent Seascapes Project can be found online here - <https://solentseascape.com/>.

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

Compliance and Enforcement Report

44. PDCO Dell provided an overview of the work undertaken by the Compliance and Enforcement Team for the reporting period August to October 2025. The data provided in the report is aligned to national IFCA metrics that are reported to the AIFCA and Defra on an annual basis, in addition to the provision of district specific metrics which capture how the CET's work is working to deliver the Southern IFCA Annual Strategy 2025-2026.

PDCO reflected on key activity during the period, including in the Poole Harbour Dredge Permit fishery, the Bass fishery, and recreational fishing and shellfish gathering.

Dr S Cripps commented that the service which had been provided to stakeholders to enable the uploading of spatial BTFG management areas onto vessel plotters was very good and requested that Members receive further information on this at a later stage. Ms E Bussey-Jones echoed this and stated it was similar to the initiative under development to introduce a Google maps tool for Southern IFCA spatial management. PDCO Dell commented that the two tools were different but delivered a similar approach, the work with stakeholders for BTFG has been tailored around the navigational equipment used on fishing vessels.

Behind the Scenes

45. A Behind the Scenes report was provided by all staff at Southern IFCA covering the period of September to November 2025.

The Chairman thanked Officers for their detailed reports.

AIFCA Annual Subscriptions

46. The Chairman stated to Members as per the recommendation at the previous Authority Meeting, the Executive Sub-Committee had written to the AIFCA on behalf of the Authority requesting information on the use of Southern IFCA's subscriptions as well as clarity on the role and funding of the Communications and Engagement Officer. The Chairman outlined that AIFCA had provided a comprehensive response which had been provided to Members as part of this Agenda Item.

Mr G Wordsworth stated that he was pleased with the response and that it was appropriate that the AIFCA be accountable to the IFCA's providing its funding. The Chairman agreed with this and emphasised the need for the work of the IFCA's being publicised at a national level.

Advertising an update to the delivery of the Fishing for Cockles (Amendment) Byelaw

47. DCO Birchenough provided Members with an update relating to the Fishing for Cockles (Amendment) Byelaw, one of the outputs of the Shore Gathering Review, specifically a change to the introductory mechanism for this Byelaw following an initial period of quality assurance with the MMO.

DCO Birchenough outlined that The Fishing for Cockles (Amendment) Byelaw will now, upon ratification by the Secretary of State, revoke the Southern IFCA Fishing for Cockles Byelaw rather than amend as previously proposed. This change relates to the mechanism by which the instrument is to be introduced, and as such there are no changes to the content or underlying intentions of The Fishing for Cockles (Amendment) Byelaw, which was formally consulted on between 17th October to 14th November 2024 as part of the wider Southern IFCA Shore Gathering Review.

DCO Birchenough informed Members that this notice had been published on the Southern IFCA website for stakeholder information and awareness and that the publication of the notice and a copy of this Authority report would be submitted to the MMO as part of the Southern IFCA QA response. Southern IFCA will continue to work with the MMO through the QA process prior to the submission of the Byelaw to the Secretary of State.

Marine Licencing

48. DCO Birchenough delivered an update report on marine licencing applications (MLAs) received by Southern IFCA during the last quarter. DCO Birchenough identified that 21 MLAs had been received between September to December 2025, 6 of which required a response, and 15 MLAs identified as not requiring a response. The number of MLAs requiring a response from

April 2025 to December 2025 represented a 12% decrease on the same period for the previous year. DCO Birchenough outlined that the report provided a summary of MLAs where a response was required for the last quarter.

Sector Group Meetings

49. The Chairman invited Members to receive the minutes from recent meetings of The South Coast Fishermen's Council, and The Dorset, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Marine Conservation Group, noting that the next meeting of The Recreational Angling Sector Group is due to take place in January 2026.

Meeting Venues 2026

50. The Facilities & Administration Officer provided Members with the dates and venues for all Authority meetings during 2026.

Cllr. R Cooper queried whether Hampshire Council had been asked if they could provide a venue. The CEO stated that all Local Authorities had been approached to ask if there were any suitable venues for holding an Authority meeting but to date there had been no responses. It was confirmed that all meeting venues had been booked for 2026, but Local Authorities will be approach again when considering venues for 2027.

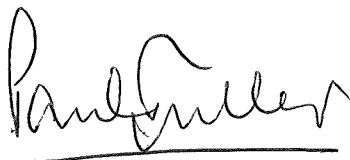
Date of Next Meeting

51. Members considered the date of the next meeting to be held at 14:00 on Thursday 12th March 2026 at the Shire Hall Museum, High Street West, Dorchester, DT1 1UY.

Resolved

52. The date of the meeting was confirmed.

The meeting concluded at 16:52.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Fuller', is written over a horizontal line.