

Portfolio holder decision – Portfolio holder for Environment and Sustainability – 7 May 2025

Phase IV of the National Network of Regional Coastal Monitoring Programmes (2027-2033)

Purpose	For Decision
Classification	Public
Executive Summary	<p>The National Network of Regional Coastal Monitoring Programmes, and the Southeast Regional Coastal Monitoring Programme are internationally recognised exemplar monitoring programmes, which directly underpin national and regional Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management in England.</p> <p>Established in 2002, the continuation of the programme is essential for coastal risk management, which requires consistent, high quality and long-term data sets.</p> <p>NFDC led on the development of the programme, and have acted as lead coordinators for the Southeast, and National programmes since their inception. There is continued support at the regional and national levels for NFDC to continue this role.</p> <p>The programme is funded 100% through Defra Grant in Aid, and the financial risk to NFDC is low. However, the material and reputational benefits of leading such a programme are significant.</p> <p>A recommendation is proposed that NFDC continue to act as the lead coordinating authority for the Southeast Regional and National programmes.</p>
Recommendation(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That NFDC continue to act as the Lead Coordinating Authority for the Southeast Regional Coastal Monitoring Programme; 2. That the Portfolio Holder approve the continued integration of the Southeast Regional Coastal Monitoring Programme

	<p>into the National Network of Regional Monitoring Programmes;</p> <p>3. That NFDC continue to act as the Lead Coordinating Authority in the development and management of Phase IV of the National Network of Regional Coastal Monitoring Programmes; and</p> <p>4. That NFDC continue to act as the Lead Authority in the application to the Environment Agency for funding of Phase IV of the National Network of Regional Coastal Monitoring Programmes.</p>
<p>Reasons for recommendation(s)</p>	<p>The recommendations support all three themes of the corporate plan. Serving as a foundation to Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management, the continuation of the Coastal Monitoring Programmes supports People, by ensure communities are resilient to future coastal change and sea level rise; Place, by providing a better understanding of future change, and underpinning the protection of our unique coastline; and Prosperity, providing both direct employment opportunities and skills training, and ensuring there is confidence in investment in our coastal communities.</p> <p>As a Risk Management Authority, NFDC must act in accordance with the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, in a manner consistent with the National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England. As a coastal protection authority, NFDC are responsible for developing Shoreline Management Plans (SMPs) and lead on coastal erosion risk management activities. Both of these require an evidence base of coastal risk and change, provided by the Coastal Monitoring Programmes.</p> <p>There is no direct cost to NFDC, as the programme is funded through Environment Agency Grant in Aid. However, the additional benefits to the council in terms of skills, services and reputation are significant.</p>
<p>Ward(s)</p>	<p>All</p>

Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Geoffrey Blunden - Environment and Sustainability
Strategic Director(s)	James Carpenter – Strategic Director of Place, Operations and Sustainability
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Introduction and background

1. This report is to inform and seek a Portfolio Holder decision on proposals for the delivery and development of the Southeast Regional Coastal Monitoring Programme element of Phase IV of the National Network of Regional Coastal Monitoring Programmes. This programme is a regional partnership initiative, which is being led and coordinated by New Forest District Council (through the Channel Coastal Observatory).
2. Executive Management Team (EMT) on the 11th February 2025 considered a report for the continuation of the next phase from April 2027.
3. The report was fully supported with agreement that NFDC continue to act as the lead authority in the development and delivery of phase IV of the programme.
4. The existing Defra Grant Aid funding for the Southeast Regional Coastal Monitoring Programme, which has been in operation since 2002, continues until March 2027.
5. Coastal risk management is conducted at broad scales relevant to coastal processes, rather than simple administrative boundaries. This necessitates partnership working by adjoining local authorities.
6. Coastal risk management requires high quality and long-term data sets to inform effective decision making in a complex environment.
7. The current approach to coastal monitoring throughout England is well established with local, regional and national groups. Based around a series of Regional Coastal Monitoring Programmes, managed through Lead Authorities on behalf of the Coastal Groups, the National Network of Regional Coastal Monitoring

Programmes provides a regionally co-ordinated and integrated approach to coastal monitoring, to maximise use of data and to provide best value.

8. The existing Southeast Regional Coastal Monitoring Programme has been promoted, developed and implemented through NFDC since its inception.
9. A regional centre of excellence has been developed, through the formation of the Channel Coastal Observatory in 2002. The specialist team provides national- and regional-scale technical support for the programme, under the technical direction of Dr Charlie Thompson, and is based at the National Oceanography Centre, Southampton. The team trains and provides a sustainable supply of specialist scientific and engineering staff that is able to service the requirements of all programme partners.
10. The Southeast Regional Coastal Monitoring Programme is recognised as an example of international best practice by maritime coastal authorities, consultants and the Environment Agency in the UK and wider.
11. Following discussions, between representatives of the Coastal Groups and the Environment Agency, NFDC have been asked to continue to coordinate and develop the National Network of Regional Coastal Monitoring Programmes, based on their specialist experience.

National Programme Aims and Structure

12. The aims of the National Network of Regional Coastal Monitoring Programmes are to:
 - a) Drive efficiency in flood and coastal erosion risk management through a robust evidence-based approach to decision making.
 - b) Develop nationally consistent guidance on the specification, management and delivery of coastal data and the development of monitoring programmes.
 - c) Develop an integrated National Network of Regional Monitoring Programmes that:
 - i. use a consistent, repeatable, risk based and cost-effective methods of monitoring the coastal environment.
 - ii. optimise available funding to deliver both strategic and operational requirements
 - iii. provide and disseminate a sound evidence base for shoreline management plans, strategies and

- iv. schemes to optimise beach management investment decisions, identify risk areas and hazards
 - iv. provide integration of regional data sets to inform national coastal and marine management and planning initiatives
 - v. develop collaboration between operating authorities, and with other government-funded organisations, and a sustainable skills base at local, regional and national scales.
- d) Establish a clear economic assessment of the benefits of monitoring and performance review criteria for future assessment of benefits
- e) Produce nationally consistent performance review criteria for assessment of monitoring programme benefits
13. The National Network of Regional Coastal Monitoring Programmes is structured to target regional variations in coastal risk and management needs, based around the Coastal Group Network. It integrates the following existing regional monitoring programmes:
- Northeast
 - East Riding of Yorkshire
 - Anglian
 - Southeast
 - Southwest
 - Northwest
14. All partner monitoring programmes have made the necessary commitment to the National Network of Regional Coastal Monitoring Programmes.
15. Programme management will require the specialist services of the Channel Coastal Observatory, together with additional resources to manage the National programme.
16. All costs associated with programme delivery will be provided through dedicated programme budgets and 100% grant aid.

New Forest District Council Role - Nationally

17. NFDC will continue to lead and coordinate programme development, implementation and delivery of the National Network of Regional Coastal Monitoring Programmes with input from the partner authorities.
18. NFDC will not have any involvement with the tender process to be followed by the other Regional Programme Lead Authorities, other than technical quality scoring assessments.

19. The regional centre of excellence (Channel Coastal Observatory) hosted by NFDC will continue to operate in its present form including storing and disseminating monitoring data from the Regional Programmes within the national network.
20. Large local authorities, such as NFDC, are expected to make a wider contribution to the local authority community and to take a lead role in national initiatives where appropriate skills are available. Such contributions to the community are reflected in periodic national assessments of local authorities and these have previously highlighted NFDCs strength in this area.

New Forest District Council Role – Southeast Region

21. NFDC will continue to act as the Lead Authority for the Southeast Regional Coastal Monitoring Programme, with continued input from the partner authorities of Adur & Worthing Councils, Canterbury City Council, Havant Borough Council and the Environment Agency. NFDC will continue to receive funding for the whole of the Southeast programme. In essence NFDC will act as a “clearing house” to distribute funding to the other partner authorities.
22. NFDC will continue to be responsible for the dynamic purchasing agreements and subsequent contract awards and contract administration.
23. Service level Agreements will be established with partner authorities as necessary to ensure cost-effective regional coverage of topographic surveys, associated data analysis and provision of annual reports. These are currently:
 - Adur & Worthing Councils
 - Canterbury City Council
 - Havant Borough Council
24. NFDC staff costs for the six year programme are estimated at £4.3m, this allows for undertaking the following services:-
 - Topographic surveys
 - Bathymetric surveys
 - Hydrodynamic Monitoring
 - Ecological monitoring
 - Coastal defence asset monitoring
 - Development and maintenance of an asset database
 - Regional data management and analysis
 - National data archive delivery and analysis
 - Regional and National Project management

Applications and Approvals

25. Before Phase IV of the National Network of Regional Coastal Monitoring Programmes can proceed it must be approved by the Environment Agency, through the Coast Protection Act of 1949.
26. An Outline Business Case (OBC) is being prepared by NFDC (on behalf of the lead partners for the Regional Coastal Monitoring Programmes) for submission to the Environment Agency's Large Project Review Group. The anticipated date of submission is December 2025.
27. The programme is currently based on a six-year national phasing. The current application being prepared is for the period April 2027 through to March 2033.

Corporate plan priorities

28. The continuation of the National Network of Regional Coastal Monitoring Programmes supports all three themes of the corporate plan:
 - a. **People:** coastal monitoring data underpins assessments of risk from flooding and erosion, and enables long term planning. This enhances community safety, enabling planning and preventive action, and building resilience. Prediction and mitigation of coastal risks protects coastal communities, provides security, and enhances a sense of place. Our commitment to open data educates the public and local organisations, empowering awareness and community engagement in resilience efforts, essential for long-term safety and well-being.
 - b. **Place:** by providing a better understanding of future change, and underpinning the protection or adaptation of our coastline, the Southeast Regional Coastal Monitoring Programme fosters sustainable development, environmental stewardship, and resilient community infrastructure. The data is central to understanding carbon cycling, climate adaptation and nature recovery of coastal areas. The partnership working approach ensures that long-term management and protection can be provided for our unique coastal environments, working at the scale of natural processes, rather than to legislative boundaries. The evidence-based approach ensures our methods, processes, and use of resources remain cutting edge, and able to adapt to changing needs.

- c. **Prosperity:** the data provided by the Southeast Regional Coastal Monitoring Programme enables informed planning that protects coastal infrastructure and assets, minimising economic risks from climate-related impacts such as flooding and erosion, and providing confidence in future investment. In addition, the programme creates demand for specialised skills in environmental science and data analysis, providing direct employment opportunities, as well as skills training in coastal processes, aligning with the goal of preparing the workforce for emerging job markets.

Options appraisal

- 29. A full options appraisal will be carried out as part of the Outline Business Case prepared for the grant funding application for the National Network of Regional Coastal Monitoring Programmes.
- 30. Potential alternative options for the Southeast Regional Coastal Monitoring Programmes include:
 - a. Cessation of the programme, and a return to local coastal monitoring.
 - b. NFDC to cease coordination of the National Network of Regional Coastal Monitoring Programme, which would pass to another Local Authority within the Southern Coastal Group.

Benefits to New Forest District Council

- 31. Benefits of leading the National Network of Regional Coastal Monitoring Programmes, and the Channel Coastal Observatory extend beyond those of the coastal monitoring programmes itself, which ensures a consistent, standardised, targeted and freely available long-term dataset of coastal change to underpin coastal management.
- 32. The Channel Coastal Observatory comprises a team of expert surveyors and coastal scientists, and trains new staff in a range of specialist skills. These staff are available as a knowledge base for NFDC, facilitating the rapid utilisation of skills and expertise which includes:
 - a) The provision of advice regarding local coastal processes, affecting the NFDC coastline.
 - b) The ability to undertake analysis work on behalf of NFDC, reducing resource need within the coastal team itself.
- 33. The size of the team ensures that it is resilient to staff turnover, which guarantees that this knowledge base is maintained and readily available. It also ensures there is a continued pool of

trained, knowledgeable staff available in the coastal management field, several of whom have gone on to work within the NFDC coastal team in the past.

34. NFDC has access to a number of innovative techniques and technologies through the Channel Coastal Observatory, which are available for wider use. Examples include:
 - a) Pre-incident and rapid incident response monitoring in the event of storms, such as following the storms of 14th February 2014.
 - b) Ongoing surveying at Barton Cliffs to assess cliff movement and stability.
 - c) Pre- and Post- works surveys (for example related to recharge activities), and
 - d) Surveys undertaken for other services within the council.
35. The Channel Coastal Observatory maintains a strong working relationship with the research and higher education communities, including long standing relationships with the University of Southampton, and National Oceanography Centre, Southampton. This ensures that NFDC keeps abreast of the latest developments, methods and theory regarding coastal process science, survey and monitoring techniques and coastal management theory allowing the coastal team to remain at the cutting edge of coastal management.

Consultation undertaken

36. The National Network of Regional Coastal Monitoring Programmes works on the basis of continued development, and as such carries out regular consultation with its key stakeholders. This includes internal Coordination Group and Strategic Board meetings, and regular attendance at national Coastal Chairs Network meetings.
37. Consultations with both the Southeast and Southern Coastal Groups have confirmed their continued support of the programme, and NFDC's coordination role. This is confirmed in the minutes of the Southern Coastal Group meeting of 25th October 2024, and the Southeast Coastal Group meeting of 5th December 2024.
38. The Environment Agency sit on the National Network of Regional Coastal Monitoring Programmes Strategic Board and Coordination Group, are members of the Business Case Working group, and attend local Project Team meetings. As such they directly influence and endorse the programme.
39. The Channel Coastal Observatory has recently concluded an extensive stakeholder consultation and survey review, for all

Coastal Protection Authorities in the Southeast region, to inform the structure of Phase IV of the programme.

40. The National Network of Regional Coastal Monitoring Programmes have recently concluded a stakeholder consultation exercise, confirming the widespread use of the programme's data for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management decision making. This solicited responses from 72 individuals representing 62 different organisations. One key finding was that 67% of Local Authority stakeholders are reliant on the programme, and have no alternative sources of data (Appendix 1).

Financial and resource implications

41. The Channel Coastal Observatory will continue in its current form as established for the Southeast Regional Coastal Monitoring Programme. Operational costs will continue to be 100% funded through the national programme, in accordance with grant memoranda.
42. NFDC employs 11.26 FTE officers for operation and development of the National Network of Regional Coastal Monitoring Programmes and delivery of the Southeast Regional Coastal Monitoring Programme. It is currently predicted that no additional staff will be required.
43. The office facilities currently provided by the National Oceanography Centre, Southampton are delivered on the basis of agreements which include contract breakpoints at the end of each monitoring phase. There are no additional cost risks associated with these hosting arrangements, beyond the life of each phase.
44. If Phase IV of the National Network of Regional Coastal Monitoring Programmes application is successful, it will be funded by grant aid administered by the Environment Agency, via the normal capital coast protection scheme funding process, for the period of six years (2027 to 2033).
45. If the programme application is unsuccessful there will be staffing costs to NFDC of circa £160,000.
46. The programme will be 100% funded through the Coast Protection Act grant rate system based on grant memorandum criteria. I.e. there will be no additional cost to the authority.
47. The current estimated cost of the national monitoring programme is in the order of £68M over the proposed 6 years of the programme.

48. The financial responsibility for NFDC will be for between £15-20M expenditure, administered between 2027 and 2033 to allow for the delivery of the Southeast Regional Coastal Monitoring Programme along with management and co-ordination of the National Network of Regional Coastal Monitoring Programmes.
49. The current practice of payment and recharging partners based on a service level agreement will be used for the National Network of Regional Coastal Monitoring Programmes. The existing recharging structure will be revised as required and agreed with corporate accountancy, to ensure that there is no financial risk to NFDC throughout programme delivery.
50. Economic analysis demonstrates that the National Network of Regional Coastal Monitoring Programmes has the potential for large-scale, region-wide, actual and efficiency savings to the taxpayer, illustrated by a Benefit : Cost ratio for Phase III of the programme of 14:1.
51. It should be noted that the Environment Agency typically release FDGiA to NFDC in advance of expenditure, this FDGiA of circa £1.8m per year supports NFDC interest earnings.

Legal implications

52. Once programme approval is received from the Environment Agency's Large Project Review Group there will be a requirement to complete the programme in accordance with the application.
53. As a Risk Management Authority, NFDC must act in accordance with the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, in a manner consistent with the National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England, to ensure 'a nation resilient to flooding and coastal change'.
54. The National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy recommends resilience and adaptation approaches, but emphasises that these need to be monitored over time. It includes a pledge to improve coastal monitoring and coastal erosion data, to underpin coastal adaptation, and has chosen to do this through investment in the National Network of Regional Coastal Monitoring Programmes of England.
55. As a coastal protection authority, NFDC are responsible for developing Shoreline Management Plans (SMPs) and for undertaking coastal erosion risk management activities, when in receipt of funding. Both of these require an evidence base of coastal risk and

coastal change. Due to the nature of coastal processes, the required data has a spatial footprint which exceeds the council boundaries, but which is provided by the partnership approaches of the Coastal Monitoring Programmes.

Risk assessment

56. A full risk assessment will be undertaken as part of the Business Case submitted to the Environment Agency as part of the funding application.

Environmental / Climate and nature implications

57. Improved decision making for both environmental impacts and financing of national, regional and local coastal protection schemes and initiatives.

Data protection/ Information governance/ ICT implications

58. As the continuation of an existing programme, there are no implications for data protection/information governance/ICT.

New Forest National Park/ Cranborne Chase National Landscape implications

59. The Southeast Regional Coastal Monitoring Programme will help inform the management of the coastal component of the National Park.

Conclusion

60. The continuation of a national coastal monitoring programme underpins the Environment Agency National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England, Shoreline Management Planning, and National Coastal Erosion Risk Mapping.
61. The Southeast Regional Coastal Monitoring Programme underpins local and regional implementation of Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management, and directly supports NFDC coastal decision making.
62. The National Network of Regional Coastal Monitoring Programmes has an established track record of success and efficiency in providing coastal change data, and was spearheaded by NFDC.
63. The continued position of NFDC as the coordinator of both the Southeast, and National programmes, is supported by regional and national stakeholder groups, and provides reputational benefits.

64. Funded entirely through Defra Grant in Aid, the programme brings substantial material and reputational benefits to NFDC at low risk, and with no financial cost

Portfolio holder endorsement

65. I have agreed to the recommendations of this report.

Signed: Cllr Geoff Blunden

Dated: 7 May 2025

Appendices:

Appendix 1 –NNRCMP Stakeholder
Feedback

Background Papers:

None

Date on which notice given of this Decision – 7 May 2025

Last date for call in – 14 May 2025