

Frome should be consistently clean and welcoming – with everyone playing their part

Background

There are a number of organisations involved in the cleaning, maintenance & general upkeep of the town, including Frome Town Council (FTC); Mendip District Council (MDC); Somerset County Council (SCC); the Somerset Waste Partnership; and the Environment Agency.

Of these organisations, MDC has perhaps the single most significant role, being responsible for almost all of the street cleansing & grounds maintenance in Frome. Indeed, although FTC is responsible for looking after most of Frome's parks & green spaces - and SCC has cleansing responsibilities linked to the drains and the road network – these are limited in comparison with MDC's responsibilities.

Necessarily, MDC has a detailed and exemplar contract in place to cover this service – and this contract is delivered by The Landscape Group (TLG).

But...

This joint *but split* responsibility can be challenging and problematic; at the very least it can mean delays working out who is responsible for any given area of land. Arguably this is one of the reasons that previous efforts to improve the overall cleanliness of the town have fallen short.

To address this, the **Keep Frome Clean Panel** was setup to lead and organise the **Keep Frome Clean** campaign, working with all of these organisations – as well as residents, businesses and other local groups.

The Keep Frome Clean Campaign

Our campaign to Keep Frome Clean means organisations working *together* to make things better.

It also means everybody doing their bit, whether that's businesses sweeping outside of their shops; people putting litter in bins or community groups tidying unloved areas.

The overall aim of the campaign is make sure that Frome is *consistently* clean, tidy & welcoming throughout the year.

Within this overall aim, the Panel suggested a remit of four general objectives:

- Promote a better understanding of who does what in the town; and the standards we can expect
- Review & report on the cleanliness of the town
- Identify ways in which the town can be made cleaner – and how everyone can play their part
- Identify ways in which we can encourage recycling across Frome



October Watch

As an important step, the Panel launched **October Watch** to get as full & detailed a picture as possible of what's going on across the town, encouraging everyone to report problems, concerns & observations throughout the month of October. This would form part of the review of the cleanliness of the town.

Coincidentally, MDC & TLG also undertook a (Mendip) district-wide customer satisfaction survey focusing on the Core Services of the Council's contract with TLG. They received 74 responses during the six-week period.

It's serendipitous that two public consultations have run so closely, since it gives us the opportunity to consider and review the key findings of both consultations.

Key Findings – October Watch

- The Panel received 94 distinct reports during October Watch, with reports coming in steadily throughout the course of the month
- Although a greater sample would have provided a more detailed picture, nearly 100 reports in a single month from residents, businesses & visitors confirmed the *general feeling* shared by the Panel that the town isn't as clean, tidy and well-kept as it should be
- Reports came in in respect of streets and areas across the town; *they weren't limited to certain areas*
- Nearly a third of the reports were concerned with 'General litter' (30 reports)
- Specific problems and concerns were reported at Rodden Bridge (pigeons) and Vicarage Street (graffiti)
- Seasonal problems like weeds and leaves were reported. Specifically, leaves were a concern where they were becoming slippery and hazardous
- Blocked drains were reported 7 times
- Very surprisingly, only two reports came in on dog's mess

Key Findings - MDC & TLG's Core Services Survey

Although the structure of the survey meant that discrete analysis of the contract here in Frome was impossible, it's notable that the three elements relating to the routine cleanliness of the district all scored below 65% - **and all three were the lowest-scoring elements of the contract.**

- Litter picking: 61%
- Street sweeping: 63%
- Weed control: 53%



Discussion Points, including Comments, Questions & Concerns

Alongside the focused discussions about October Watch and the Core Services Survey, the Panel also discussed the town-wide picture in general terms.

The comments, questions and concerns that came from these discussions are collected here:

- Does TLG's team on the ground have sufficient resources allocated to Frome to deliver MDC's contract on a day to day basis?
- Does TLG's team here in Frome have the right equipment for the work?
- Does FTC have sufficient resources in place to maintain the town's parks & green spaces?
- How is MDC's contract enforced when standards aren't met?
- Without strict enforcement of contracts there's a risk that standards will be allowed to slide...
- Are dog owners and walkers aware that they can use regular litter bins for bagged dog's mess?
- Are there enough bins across the town and are they in the right places?
- Is there enough civic pride in the town?
- Are community litter picks and clean-ups working? Are they promoted and publicised enough? Do enough people turn up?
- Can graffiti be removed from bins? Or painted over – perhaps as a community initiative?
- There seems to be lots of damaged or old & unloved bins around the town - can these be replaced more quickly and to an agreed schedule?
- Reports are always helpful – but sometimes it would help (and see quicker results!) if they were more exact; “The bin at the junction of Berkley Road and North Parade is full” is better than “The bin by at the top of the hill is full”
- Drains across the town are blocked – is SCC's current maintenance cycle sufficient?
- How does SCC prefer reports to be made?
- Who does what to clean up after the markets?
- Who does what to clean up after town centre events?
- Collectively we need to be sensible with fly-posting
Flyers & posters promoting current or upcoming events are usually fine - in fact they suggest a lively and interesting town! Old, tatty and out of date flyers & posters should be removed more quickly
- Getting sweepers down roads with lots of parked cars is sometimes impossible, especially where cars rarely move
- Why can't we recycle more plastics? Other counties manage it...
- The teams picking up household rubbish and (especially) recycling should be more careful – it often ends up on the floor instead of in the van. At the very least they should pick up any rubbish they drop!
- The town's roundabouts should be better kept – and illegal advertising should be removed



Summary of Findings

At the first Panel meeting it was generally agreed that the town wasn't as clean as it should be – people mentioned the feeling that dirt & litter were endemic across the town centre.

This sentiment was shared by the Town Centre Panel – which commented in its report: 'There needs to be an honest recognition that the town centre is not cleaned well enough'

Historically, similar comments have been made in numerous published documents relating to the town, including Vision For Frome's Community Plan.

Arguably these feelings have been reiterated by the number and variety of reports received by the Keep Frome Clean Panel during October Watch. It's also notable that the three elements of the contract that relate to the routine cleanliness of the district all scored below 65% in MDC & TLG's joint Core Services Survey - **and that all three were the lowest-scoring elements of the contract.**

Although it wasn't identified as much as expected during October Watch, dog's mess continues to be a significant blight across the town as well. In fact outside of October Watch this is reported regularly – and often proves to be particularly emotive.

Very simply, the Panel's discussions and the findings of both surveys support the view that the town isn't always as clean as it should be – with various concerns including litter, weeds, dog's mess, drains, fly-posting, events and roundabouts.

However the fact is that reactive 'fixing' works generally happen quickly – and they are generally effective in bringing areas back up to standard.

It was also the case that a concerted and dedicated joint effort between FTC, MDC & TLG before The Academy of Urbanism judging tour saw a marked improvement in the cleanliness of town in August (2015)

This all suggests that the town can be consistently clean and welcoming – and that working together more closely and effectively might be the best way of achieving this.

NB. Although the Panel discussed & considered recycling in Frome – and there are Recommendations to follow on this – the nature and scope of this topic means that more time could readily be dedicated to continuing with more specific & specialist discussions here.



Recommendations

- a. FTC to regularly update the information on its website, providing clear and current information about who does what in the town – and the best and most effective ways to report queries and problems
- b. FTC to regularly send out information in community newsletters, emails and via social media, promoting the Keep Frome Clean campaign and highlighting simple ways of keeping Frome clean
- c. FTC & MDC to promote effective reporting of problems through fixmystreet
- d. FTC to employ an additional full-time or part-time Ranger focused on the town centre to deliver work including seasonal work & emergency support
- e. MDC to ensure effective monitoring of its contract so that standards are met consistently and that faults or problems are addressed
- f. FTC & MDC to work together on joint contract monitoring at least once a month
- g. FTC & MDC to work together on a fixed period of intensive contract monitoring to bring the entire town back to standard
- h. FTC to identify locations for new litter bins on an annual basis leading in to the Council's budget setting processes
- i. TLG to complete a town-wide bin condition & location survey, reporting back to MDC & FTC
- j. FTC to continue discussions with SCC about additional gulley & drain cleansing in Frome
- k. FTC to work with SCC in an annual review of the gulley & drain cleansing schedule
- l. FTC & MDC to launch a number of joint promotions & publicity campaigns, including an 'Any bin will do' reminder for dog owners and a 'No butts!' campaign aimed at smokers
- m. FTC to promote household recycling via regular tips on social media
- n. FTC to work with local schools in promoting the Keep Frome Clean campaign and providing advice about recycling
- o. FTC to establish and promote community clean-ups, including Ranger Days and an annual town clean-up tied to the Keep Britain Tidy campaign
- p. FTC to link the Keep Frome Clean campaign to the Government's new & developing national litter strategy
- q. FTC to encourage businesses and shopkeepers across the town to sweep and tidy their frontages with an awards scheme: the Frome Broom! The awards scheme could be expanded to include categories for schools, residents and communities too
- r. FTC to work with MDC after events, including markets, to make sure the town is clean and tidy
- s. FTC to ensure other organisations, residents and business communities are kept up to date and aware of events – to ensure provision for clean-ups
- t. FTC to work with local venues and promoters to encourage responsible advertising, including the removal of out of date and tatty flyers/posters
- u. FTC to work with MDC & SCC to look at the upkeep of the town's roundabouts – and explore opportunities for advertising & sponsorship
- v. FTC to consider a dedicated Panel to look at recycling in Frome, including opportunities for recycling bins in public places and spaces

