

# **FROME TOWN COUNCIL**

*making Frome a better place*

To Members of Frome Town Council:

Al O’Kane, Alison Barclay, Cath Puddick, Colin Cobb, Gary Collinson, Heather Wride, Jean Boulton, Kate Bielby, Mel Usher, Nick White, Peter Macfadyen, Pippa Goldfinger, Richard Ackroyd, Sheila Gore, Tim O’Connor, Toby Eliot, Tricia Golinski

## **ANNUAL FROME TOWN COUNCIL MEETING**

**Wednesday 20 May 2015, 7pm**

**Assembly Rooms, Christchurch Street West, Frome BA11 1EB**

Please contact Rebecca Krzyzosiak ([admin@frometowncouncil.gov.uk](mailto:admin@frometowncouncil.gov.uk)) in advance of the meeting if you are unable to attend

### **AGENDA**

1. Questions, comments and information from the public and county and district Cllrs
2. Short “thank you” from the outgoing Mayor, Cllr Peter Macfadyen
3. Election of the Town Mayor and Deputy Town Mayor
4. Declaration of office, submission of Cllrs registers of interests, apologies for absence, declaration of members’ interests and minutes from the last meeting on 21 May 2014
5. Short presentation from Paul Wynne, Town Clerk, which will include the recommendation to adopt the General Power of Competence, suspend standing orders and review them and hold an extra-ordinary Council meeting on 24 June to agree revised standing orders.
6. Agree the Annual Return for year ended 31 March 2015
7. The next meeting will be at 7pm on 24 July 2015, Forward Space, Butts Hill BA11 1BH

Yours sincerely



Paul Wynne, Town Clerk  
Frome Town Council, 5 Palmer Street, Frome BA11 1DS  
13 May 2015

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## **Agenda**

- 1. Questions, comments and information from the public and county and district Cllrs**
- 2. Short “thank you” from the outgoing Mayor, Cllr Peter Macfadyen.**
- 3. Election of the Town Mayor and Deputy Town Mayor**
- 4. Declaration of office, submission of Cllrs registers of interests, apologies for absence, declaration of members’ interests and minutes from the last meeting on 21 May 2014**
- 5. For decision: An introduction to Frome Town Council and some recommendations on the General Power of Competence, standing orders and future meetings**

Author: Paul Wynne, Town Clerk

### *Summary*

This report accompanies a short presentation at Council on 20 May. It gives a little background aimed more at those Cllrs and the public who may not be very familiar with inner workings of FTC. All documents referred to in this report will be provided to Cllrs in their welcome pack. The report recommends suspending standing orders – the “rules” of the Council – in order to review them, agree to adopt the General Power of Competence and agree to draft a new corporate strategy.

### *What is Frome Town Council?*

Frome Town Council is a statutory body and is one of three tiers of local government in Somerset. We also have Mendip District Council and Somerset County Council. We are governed by the same legislation as parish councils. Collectively town, parish and city council are usually called local councils.

There are 80,000 councillors and 9,000 local councils in England. Over 16 million people live in communities served by local councils, which is around 25 per cent of the population.

FTC is one of the larger local councils in the country, and comprises 17 Cllrs representing the community in eight wards; it raised a precept of £1.034m from Council Tax payers in Frome for 2015/16 and currently employs 17 members of staff (equating to 13 full time equivalents).

### *Who are the staff?*

Cllrs have received in their welcome pack an organisation chart showing the staff structure. Staff members will be introduced to Cllrs at the meeting. A photo and summary of responsibilities can be found [here](#).

### *General power of competence (GPC)*

The power to deliver local services is provided by the GPC. It was brought into force by the Localism Act 2011. The Explanatory Memorandum states:

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“The Government’s intention in providing eligible parish councils with the general power of competence is to better enable them to take on their enhanced role and allow them to do the things they have previously been unable to do under their existing powers”

In short, the GPC gives eligible local councils, “the power to do anything that individuals generally may do” as long as they do not break other laws.

In order to use the GPC Cllrs must resolve at this meeting that it has an electoral mandate (2/3 of the Cllrs elected) and have a properly qualified Clerk. I can confirm both of these.

### *Recommendation*

*Confirm that the eligibility criteria for utilising the power of general competence are met.*

### *Standing Orders*

Standing Orders (SOs) are the rules of the Council, they stipulate how we operate. There are things that Council must legislatively do (in bold in the SOs) and what the previous Council chose to do (not bold). SOs will be given to Cllrs with their welcome pack but can also be found [here](#).

SOs include what to do at this, the first and Annual Town Council meeting. The only thing this meeting must do is to elect a chair/mayor and a vice chair/deputy mayor. SOs also say that FTC should agree a committee structure, terms of reference for committees and agree to appoint a Leader of the Council. However, I have talked with a few Cllrs since the election and it appears there is an enthusiasm for a review of SOs and in particular the role of committees. This is a wise thing to do as it gives every Cllr the opportunity to influence how the Council operates. With this in mind I recommend suspension of standing orders so that a review can go ahead as soon as possible.

### *Recommendation*

*Under section 25a of standing orders (“Any or every part of the Standing Orders, except those which are mandatory by law, may be suspended by Council resolution in relation to any specific item of business.”) suspend standing orders, review them and agree any amendments at an extra-ordinary Council meeting on 10 June.*

Between now and 10 June I suggest that a small working party (recruited at the meeting) is established to explore how SOs could change and to propose these changes to the meeting on 10 June.

### *Recommendation*

*Elect a working party of three Cllrs and the Clerk to review the SOs and propose a revision to Council on 10 June.*

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Suspension of SOs means that the planning sub-committee meeting planned for 28 May would not go ahead. In this instance it is proposed to delegate to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Mayor any responses that FTC is/are consulted on.

### *Recommendation*

*Delegate any responses to planning applications that are received up to 10 June to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Mayor.*

### *Calendar of Meetings*

Council has already agreed the calendar of meetings for the year ahead. At this time, I suggest Cllrs note these dates. Following the review of SOs we can decide whether to re-arrange the calendar.

### *Corporate Strategy and Action Plan*

At the present time, we are working to implement the final year of our corporate strategy – the Strategy for Success - and the Action Plan for the year ahead. Doubtless this will change but it is something to build on and until it does change it forms the basis of our work. Cllrs will see from the summary of the Action Plan at Appendix 2 the projects we are working on at the moment. The major projects will be briefly described at the meeting.

As the current strategy is in its last year and with a new Council in place, there is a need for a new corporate strategy and work needs to start on this soon so that the budget and work programme for next financial year can be developed in time for when we submit our precept demand in January 2016. A new strategy gives FTC the opportunity to work with the community to produce and then implement a strategy that everyone is confident reflects the needs of the town.

In order to be confident about the strategy a town-wide exercise of engagement should be carried out. This can comprise as many different methods as necessary (workshops, focus groups, e-surveys etc) but should include a professional survey to make sure we build a strategy based on a statistically representative data. The cost of this type of survey will be shared at the meeting.

I suggest that a small working party (recruited at the meeting) is established to include the Community Projects Officer and the Clerk, initially to oversee the engagement exercise and to delegate to the Clerk the commissioning a survey in June/July and report back to Council on 16 September the results. At which time it can be discussed how to proceed with developing a new strategy.

### *Recommendations*

1. Confirm that the eligibility criteria for utilising the power of general competence are met.
2. Under section 25a of standing orders, suspend standing orders, review them and agree any amendments at an extra-ordinary Council meeting on 10 June.
3. Elect a group of three Cllrs and the Clerk to review the SOs and propose revision to Council on 10 June.

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4. Draft a new corporate strategy to be approved at the Council meeting in January 2016 and, in order to progress this:
  - a. Establish a working party comprising three Cllrs, the Community Projects Officer and the Town Clerk to oversee initial town-wide engagement process
  - b. Delegate to the Clerk in consultation with the working party, the commissioning of a public survey in June/July
  - c. Report back to Council on 16 September the results of the survey and a plan of how to proceed with the strategy

## 6. **For decision : Agree the Annual Return for year ended 31 March 2015**

Author: Responsible Finance Officer

### *Purpose of the report*

To confirm the accounts stated on the Annual Return for the financial year 2014/15 at Appendix 3 present fairly the financial position of Frome Town Council. If any Cllrs would like any more detail on any element of the Annual Return please contact me. In addition, the RFO will present an overview of the budget for the current year.

### *Background*

Every year we have to complete an Annual Return and submit it to the External Auditors – Grant Thornton. It is designed to provide an independent check on how we operate, that we understand our risks and that we manage those risks. The Annual Return's ten boxes compare income and expenditure during the previous two financial years, 2013/14 and this year 2014/15.

#### Box 1

Balances brought forward at the **start** of the financial years, the total of general and earmarked reserves at 01/04/13 compared to those at 01/04/14 an increase of £100k, the Council Support Tax grant received enabled new earmarked reserves to be established to fund Fair Frome, Youth Research, FE and supporting Youth activities.

#### Box 2

Annual Precept for 14/15, a 3% increase of £31k on 13/14, but a reduction in real terms of the Town Council's portion of the Council Tax bill.

#### Box 3

Total other receipts, a reduction in 14/15 of £388k as PWLB loan for cheese & grain redevelopment and Christmas Extravaganza sponsorship was received in 13/14 offset in 14/15 by increased Section 106 agreements plus other funding including Sport England, Local Legacy, EU and Carplus Trust.

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## Box 4

Staff costs overall a reduction of £10k, savings made during the vacancy period during recruitment of new staff.

## Box 5

PWLB repayments increase of £23k due to Cheese & Grain redevelopment loan taken out in 2013.

## Box 6

Other expenditure comparing 13/14 to 14/15 decreased by £454k significant one off expenditure being in 13/14 for C&G redevelopment, C&G funding, Jenson Button Christmas Extravaganza (£599k), significant 14/15 one off expenditure was the MUGA and play equipment in MBPF and Welshmill, plus the contribution to save Whatcombe Fields (£148k).

## Box 7

These figures compare reserves at the **end** of the financial years, 2014/15 saw FTC's reserves increased by £186k. The figure of £1.1m includes General Reserves £255k, an increase of £24k but there are commitments carried forward from 2014/15 making the actual GR £190k, £10k above the agreed £180k minimum.

Earmarked reserves of £899k an increase of £162k namely earmarking the Council Support Tax grant, for Community Groups subsidy in Frome Town Hall, S106 money and EU funding.

## Box 8

Total bank and investment deposits increased by £172k, as mentioned in box 7 reserves increased by £186k less the increase in debtors plus the increase in creditors at the end of the year resulted in bank deposits increase of £172k.

## Box 9

Total fixed assets increased by £340k significantly due to reinstatement of the Town Council offices revaluation, as advised by the External Auditors, plus the purchase and transfer of assets namely the MUGA and play equipment in Mary Baily Playing Field, Welshmill and Foundry Barton plus the Singer's factory artefacts less disposal of other assets namely inoperative Christmas lights, unsupported IT and office equipment and several items of Victoria Park equipment.

## Box 10

Total borrowings decreased £61k due to the annual capital repayments reducing the amount outstanding.

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The Annual Return has been signed off by the Internal Auditors and their report is at Appendix 4.

## *Earmarked Reserves*

The proposed Earmarked Reserves position as at 31/03/2015 can be seen at the end of the budget table at Appendix 5.

Existing Earmarked Reserves have been expended and added to during the course of the 2014/15 financial year, the Council budgeted in 2014/15 to 'top up' certain EMRs for specific projects including Elections, Town Office relocation, Play Equipment, projects which require significant expenditure and have been saved up for over several years.

In addition to existing EMRs, it is proposed to create additional EMRs, in effect carrying forward 2014/15 budgets, to enable completion of work plus specific grant funding received late in the financial year for 2015/16 projects.

### **EMR 9054      Open Spaces    £30k**

The 2014/15 budget Community Open Spaces was increased to include maintenance of the Cheese Field, Millennium Green, Rodden Meadow and the Dippy, however, as the Council did not acquire ownership of the Cheese Field, and the transfer of the Dippy ownership came through late in the financial year this budgeted work did not start. It is proposed to establish an EMR to support this work during 2015/16.

### **EMR 9055      Website            £10k**

The 2014/15 IT budget was increased and whilst the new websites were launched, the business and community database work was not completed and the budget not completely spent. As the work is on-going it is proposed to create a new EMR to finance these improvements in 2015.

### **EMR 9053      Trees                £8.7k**

The 2014/15 Tree budget included the commissioning of a Tree Survey. However, staff changes in the Outside Services team resulted in the survey not taking place and it must be carried out ASAP. It is proposed to create an EMR in order for this work to be commissioned as early as possible in 2015.

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## **EMR 9051      Neighbourhood Plan   £14.3k**

In 2014/15 we budgeted for an Employment Land Study which forms part of the Neighbourhood Plan. This work is nearing completion and it is proposed to create an EMR to enable this study to be finalised.

## **EMR 9052      Tourism      £3.7k**

Grant funding received from Mendip Tourism with the second tranche expected spring 2015.

## **EMR 9013      Litter Bins & noticeboards   £3.2k**

Grant funding received from District & County Councillors to fund litter bins and noticeboards in their wards.

## **EMR 9017      S106   £65k**

Grant funding received from a S106 agreement for the future maintenance of the Foundry Barton and riverside area, including play equipment and Singers Factory artefacts.

## **EMR 9050      Twinning Thematic Networking   £12.3k**

EU grant funding received for Twinning Thematic Networking to finance various events in 2015/16.

Overall the financial situation remains healthy and the Council continues to be very active in investing in the town and residents of Frome.

### *Recommendations*

1. Approve the Annual Return for year ended 31 March 2015 and instruct the Mayor to sign the following parts on behalf of Council:
  - a. Section 1 Accounting Statements to certify that the accounting statements fairly present the financial position of Frome Town Council at the end of the financial year 2014/15.
  - b. Section 2 Annual Governance Statement that to the best of their knowledge the Council has ensured there is a sound system of internal control including the preparation of the accounting statements in place and boxes 1 – 9 are ticked to agree yes to the statements.
  - c. To agree the Earmarked Reserves position as at 31/03/2015.



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- d. To note that the Internal Auditors report approves the final accounts and the summary in the Annual Return.

**7. The next meeting will be at 7pm on 24 July 2015, Forward Space, Butts Hill BA11 1BH**