

Agenda item 4

For decision: Wellbeing – a way forward

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Summary

Over the last few months all councillors and staff have been holding informal meetings about wellbeing. These considerations have been heavily influenced by the outcomes from the Wellbeing and Sports panels.

This report proposes a direction of travel which leads to eight specific recommendations, including the recruitment of an additional member of staff to work with partners at a more strategic level.

Background

It is increasingly clear that as 'austerity' really bites, the Town will have to provide for itself in key areas. For the Council this requires two decisions:

1. In what areas – if any – do we wish to act?
2. And if we wish to act, then do we do this directly (through providing where possible a direct service) or indirectly (through assisting and facilitating community organisations)?

In response to question 1: The Town Council's adopted strategy covers three inter-connected objectives: wellbeing, prosperity and environmental sustainability/resilience. All these terms are broad in meaning and overlap - wellbeing is described in the strategy as 'A flourishing and active community of people and organisations working together'. In order to achieve this for a town such as Frome, there needs to be adequate provision of health, education and social care with 'safety nets' for the most vulnerable, ill, isolated and poor. Our research shows that this area is critically under threat.

In response to question 2: Over the last six years this Town Council has placed particular emphasis on building the capacity of the voluntary sector. Our discussions lead us to the view that this has been largely successful and should be continued and strengthened. Given this ethos it would be wrong to now take-on the provision of services – as well as financially rash. Our role should be:

5. Collating local information
6. Garnering local experiences
7. Identifying gaps in service provision
8. Helping organisations, both voluntary or statutory, to spend and deploy resources wisely in Frome.

In effect, we should provide some of what we already do but with more strategic capacity.

The Wider Picture

The imposition of austerity has radically changed the provision of public services. Most commentators agree that unprotected services, like much of Local Government, have suffered a 40% loss in funding, the NHS has held steady but is unable to keep up with demand, central government rules on welfare have been tightened up and charities have seen a surge in their client base. Some long-term trends like decreasing job security, the breakdown of many communities, the loss of traditional job bases and concerns about climate, sustainability and economic recession are all influencing events.

Just as important is the change in demographics; there are more people living longer, there are less people of a working age, less young people and more people living with debilitating illnesses like diabetes and obesity (the UK having the second highest incidence of obesity in Europe). The health implications of the isolation of some communities and individuals are only now being recognised.

In Frome, the public, business and voluntary sectors are working hard to establish services to meet these needs and focusing on preventing some of the factors that make people unwell (e.g. isolation, lack of employment opportunities). There is no shortage of innovation, hard work and goodwill within the town but here – as elsewhere – many services are teetering. A local GP summed up the situation by describing issues facing teenagers, the multiple issues for an increasingly ageing population and the problems experienced by the 7-800 carers in Frome. The police emphasise that the withdrawal of many mental health and social service provisions to Shepton Mallet has hampered their work. Fair Frome talk about real food poverty affecting some people every day, requiring a distribution of 10 tons of donated food in 15/16. The Resilience Officer in the Town Council is concerned about what happens during cold weather as Frome has the highest incidence of fuel poverty in Mendip with 44% of households needing to spend more than 10% of their gross income on heating. There are many other examples.

New Thinking

Some people in government – at many levels – have recognised there is a need for a fundamental change in thinking: That communities and individuals need to become more directly involved in supporting one another; resources, even if reduced, need to be more flexible; and that working in a joined-up fashion across agencies and service providers will help everyone. The belief is that the linking of formal and informal, of statutory and voluntary and the rebuilding of communities across all ages and backgrounds is the only way to tackle increasing issues of wellbeing.

It has also been recognised that, if people are connected rather than isolated, active rather than sedentary, stimulated rather than bored, contributing rather than just receiving, and so on, then wellbeing is increased and, by implication, ill health and hence the number of people needing to access services, is diminished. The NHS and Adult Social Care are, by definition, services but they exist in a system and if that system promotes prevention before people enter it and provides community capacity when people exit it, then the strain on services is less and people's lives are better for it.

However, the paradox is that, in times of spending reductions, it is the investment in prevention, early intervention and capacity building that are the first to go. This places intolerable strain on welfare services of all kinds, unless there are some conscious interventions. In parallel, there has been little investment in local capacity and delivery, for example at a town level, where unique circumstances and solutions could be taken into account.

Frome Town Council's ethos and approach to date.

In the widest sense, *all* of what we do as a town council has an impact on wellbeing. However, focus on provision of open spaces, on maintaining job opportunities, on reducing pollution and waste, on increasing energy efficiency (fuel poverty being a significant issue) and improving more sustainable transport are covered by other work streams in the council. We will concentrate here on those parts of wellbeing provision that are more directly concerned with establishing and maintaining good health, connecting with others and finding support for the most vulnerable, isolated and disadvantaged.

Over the last 6 years, the approach of this council has been to recognise and support the extraordinarily wealth of expertise and energy within the town's voluntary sector. This places the council in the position of catalyst and supporter, rather than somewhere to turn to with either a right or an expectation of direct service provision. This has served us well, leading to:

- Initiating and supporting a cross section of services through grants e.g. Fair Frome, the Volunteer Base, Active and In Touch, Frome Community Education, CAB, Edventure Frome, a range of sports development projects, the Share Shop, the Community Fridge and Mendip Health Connectors (See Appendix 1 at the bottom of this report for more detail).
- Holding events that bring the town together e.g. the children's festival, the youth conference, Voluntea in the park.
- Increasing capacity within the Voluntary Sector:
 - Development of a volunteer base
 - A programme of training for trustees, volunteers and staff
 - Contracted fundraising support and advice for voluntary sector
 - Support and facilitation for groups that want to expand and those in crisis e.g. HR matters, funding
 - Advice on business planning, constitutions and registering as a charity
 - Practical support with the provision of resources and FTC staffing
- Hosting of the Wellbeing and Sports and Leisure Forums.

In many ways, this approach mirrors the 'new thinking' described above – but it is carried out without a central role by the people of Frome in determining and defining strategic links to existing services. Over 10% of the overall town council budget is used to fund this work directly.

It is a testimony to some dedicated people working on the ground that there are so many innovative and successful organisations. However, development is often ad hoc and dependent on the goodwill and hard work of some key people struggling to maintain

funding and with little space for learning and reflection. As traditional services are reduced, demand is burgeoning while costs are rising. For example, recent changes to universal credit along with rent capping have added huge pressures. The issues facing individuals are complex and don't fit institutional boxes, top down committees don't work, neither do large scale bureaucratic responses and the distinction between social care and health remains an anomaly.

Proposals

The work of the last six months leads to the view that the council should build on what we already do in this area of the strategy, strengthen it and be opportunistic. The latter element is important: once we move further down this path new areas will emerge and will have to be placed into some kind of matrix. It is however fanciful to think we can fundamentally change large issues like mental health provision and housing; being wildly over ambitious will help no-one.

It has become obvious during our considerations that the council needs greater capacity in the area of wellbeing if it is to make a significant impact. This needs to be in the form of a senior individual. In this report, we are asking for approval in principle for this post to be established. At the January council meeting further more detailed proposals will be included for council consideration. This meeting will decide the budget for 2017/18 and report on necessary amendments to the staff structure.

The key tasks for the new post would be:

- To keep abreast of wider developments around wellbeing both locally and nationally
- To develop stronger, more strategic, relationships with key people within the public, voluntary and business sector in order to review services and identify gaps that are emerging
- To work with the public, voluntary and business sector in order to establish a co-ordinated plan for the town's development.
- Negotiate and co-ordinate innovative solutions to problems as they arise
- Part of the senior leadership team within the council

All other community development work will continue as now.

Recommendations

1. The Council should initiate, support and strengthen as many voluntary sector undertakings as possible.
2. The Council should not be a direct provider of services unless absolutely necessary.
3. A new senior post to manage the council's wellbeing aspirations be established, subject to more detail at the next council on its remit and budget implications.
4. The following areas are priorities for 2017/18 (but not in priority order):
 - Young people
 - Neighbourhood development (decreasing isolation)
 - Carers
 - Deprivation within the town
 - Literacy
 - Sports development
 - Volunteering
 - Older people
5. Detailed reports (including successes, timelines and costings) of significant wellbeing schemes supported and funded by the Council to be presented to the Town Matters Committee on an annual basis. Future funding to be dependent on the submission of such reports
6. Each year the Council should set aside at least 10% of its budget for direct voluntary sector support
7. The Council should understand more clearly the work done by Health Centre with a view to assisting new opportunities, filling in gaps and working closer with the Health and Community connectors projects
8. The Council, after consultation and agreement the other relevant parties, should arrange, staff and record the findings of the Wellbeing, Sports and other fora and publish an annual "State of Frome Wellbeing" review.

Appendix 1

Primary Health and Social Care.

Perhaps the most successful scheme in Frome and across Mendip is Health Connections Mendip (HCM). HCM works with people in the community to find practical solutions to fill gaps in provision, but just as importantly, to increase local confidence and engagement. Funded and run by the Clinical Commissioning Group and based in Frome this is a serious and unique, but currently time limited, project that opens up new areas of provision.

HCM started by mapping what already exists and there is a comprehensive map of local support on healthconnectionsmandip.org/. This information is advertised and transferred in a variety of ways but most often through local GPS's. There are a lot more groups out there than many might imagine, often their presence is not well known and co-ordination is limited. Over the last year over 1500 people have been signposted to support services and over 25,000 people have used the website.

HCM recognises that groups and services take many forms. They support people to set up peer groups, recognising that local communities have assets, skills, knowledge and experience that enables them to offer valuable help to their peers. They can guide people to set-up and provide longer term advice and interest. Peer group examples include multiple sclerosis, macular degeneration and a stroke support group. Participants report good results from sharing information with, and caring about, one another through examples like the Talking Cafe in the Cheese and Grain.

Health Connectors offer one to one appointments where they can listen to people's health stories, support people with long term conditions and assist in making life changes. HCM has five full time equivalent health connectors. And 81% of people seen report an improvement in their wellbeing. The service is likely to be expanded for carers in the near future.

Community connectors signpost family, colleagues and neighbours to support in their own communities. They enable large numbers of individuals to access health support and advice and are aware of the wider determinants of health like education and work opportunities. A connector receives locally tailored training and normally lives in the area they represent. 53 community connectors have been trained across Mendip and FTC part-funds a co-ordinator post dedicated to Frome.

Community Catalysts supported by the County runs a micro enterprise that supports the self-employment of local people using direct payments to pay for the provision of services within their neighbourhood (e.g. care and gardening).