

Agenda item 4

For Discussion: Build opportunities for local people to support each other

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Summary

This report summarises the work to date by Frome Town Council to engage with residents in their local and wider communities. It discusses projects initiated in recent years providing a background for future development work in this area.

Councillors are asked to consider the role of FTC in future community development work.

Background

Frome Town Council has initiated a series of projects, in recent years, to engage residents in affecting positive change in their immediate and wider communities.

Frome wide projects

[Participate Frome](#) (2013) This project, based on the work of Russell Cormac's Nurture Development model, encouraged residents to think about how they could get involved in creating change and tackling issues that are important to them. The recommendations from this project suggest that 'Frome Town Council find a balance between delivering practical action in the town and increasing support to enable strategic social development'.

As a result of this report FTC now provide support, advice and guidance for organisations to work more collaboratively and try new ways of engagement. In addition, FTC have commissioned Volunteer Frome to promote, increase and celebrate volunteers (this project is discussed in more detail elsewhere on this meeting's agenda).

Through the Participate Frome project the community identified a series of issues in the town that needed tackling: to improve traffic flow through the town centre; to improve the range of shops; to reduce car park charges; to improve services for young people; to improve access to the river; to work towards better community cohesion between young and old, and old and new, and to increase information about services.

[Youth Services](#) report (2013); This work with local young people helped to identify changes that could be made to the provision of youth services in the town. FTC commissioned a project co-delivered by Somerset Rural Youth and the YMCA to provide outreach youth opportunities in parks and open spaces. FTC has subsequently supported the YMCA, Young People Frome and Purple Elephant to develop and deliver other projects across the town.

The 'Make A Difference' Youth Conference. This conference has run for the last two years at Frome Football Club. It has been successful in bringing together all year 8 pupils from Selwood and Oakfield Academies to consider key issues for young people in Frome. It aims to engage young people in identifying the things that matter to them and plan how they can 'make a difference' in supporting, building and engaging in projects which address them.

Events in the town

Over the years we have aimed to build social cohesion with a number of events that FTC hosts. These include the Christmas light switch on, Voluntea in the Park and Mayhem in the Meadow. We also facilitate a series of other opportunities for professionals, business owners, volunteers and other interested residents to get together to consider a range of topics. These include the Business Breakfast, Discuss and Do and a well established training program.

In 2015 FTC facilitated a number of topic based panels as a means of engaging a wide range of residents and professionals in informing the future direction in Wellbeing, Sports and Leisure, the Town Centre and, latterly, the Performing Arts.

We fund and support many other key events for the town: The Children's Festival; The Carnival Fun Day; The Children's Festival Christmas Party; Frome Festival; Frome Carnival; and The Lions fun day. We use these opportunities to promote and clarify the role of FTC and provide an opportunity for staff and Councillors to engage with residents.

In 2017, FTC delivered the first series of participatory budgeting (PB) initiatives for Frome, which included an opportunity for local organisations to pitch to a cross section of local people for funding to support events in the town. This event is likely to be the start of a series of PB events in future. A report about PB will be coming to the October Council meeting.

Local Community

We have resourced town wide projects in order to increase the participation and social cohesion amongst residents. But we have also been engaged in targeting local neighbourhood groups. Research has shown if stronger relationships are forged at neighbourhood level we are more likely to care for each other and the local environment.

The [Community Connections](#) project (2015) built on the recommendations of Participate Frome and the Wellbeing Forum. It focused on three different communities in the town: Trinity, Trinity Park and Packsaddle, and aimed to increase cohesion and connection. The project found that there are number of factors which influence the capacity of a community to come together and suggested a series of recommendations for FTC.

We have learnt that parks, open spaces, paved areas such as street corners and car parks provide a natural, physical meeting space. Frome is fortunate in the number of spaces available for community use which can act as a catalyst for bringing people together.

As a result of the Community Connections Project FTC have produced a practical guide to hosting [Street Parties](#), initially used as part of the Queens 90th Birthday celebrations in 2016. In 2017 three streets have used this guide to deliver successful events and we are looking to use these as case studies to promote the positive impact of street parties in future years.

FTC part fund a post managed by the Mendip Health Connections project.

(<https://healthconnections mendip.org/>) Part of this project trains Community Connectors to support residents and signposts them to projects and services. It increases social prescribing and reduces isolation and hospital admissions. Although they are town wide they have been recruiting Community Connectors within the three areas targeted above.

At the time of writing, the Somerset Community Catalyst project, which supports and recruits micro social care service providers across the county is looking to extend their reach in Frome.

It plans to work closely with the Mendip Health Connections Project to promote the work through a campaign called 'Frome Cares'. At this stage, FTC has agreed to support the project through locally focused promotion. Frome Cares will build on the work of Julian Abel, making Compassionate Communities relevant in all aspects of neighbourly support and care.

Discussion

The ethos of FTC has been to facilitate and enable the community to help itself; leading by example rather providing direct services. We have used a traditional approach to community development, intending to inspire and enable residents in the town and where possible create the conditions for change. We have a community grants programme, a community group training programme, we provide fundraising support and reactive support for community groups. And we have knowledgeable and accessible staff team who work with residents and practitioners.

Where possible FTC has aimed to build on work that has already been done. However, there is a sense that we are often revisiting past consultations and don't fully deliver on recommendations and don't always complete projects before moving on to the next one.

1. *Are we spreading ourselves too thin and moving on to the next project before we've completed the last one?*

FTC continues to develop projects with local people, businesses, community organisations and professionals and have a growing ethos of participation in all aspects of our work. However, there is an ongoing challenge around how to share information about the myriad projects and initiatives that are going on in Frome. Sometimes gaps, in social care service provision, for example, are more to do with lack of collaboration and knowledge of what already exists in town.

With an ever increasing growth of initiatives in Frome there is a danger that projects are not followed through and consolidated. For example, it was anticipated that FTC would continue to work in the three communities targeted in the Community Connections project but this hasn't happened. Similarly, the Youth Conference was commissioned to be the catalyst for a series of projects throughout the year where young people would be supported to deliver projects designed to address issues identified by them: vandalism, graffiti, litter and dog poo. There has been limited progress in the delivery of these projects and we recognise that consistent engagement from FTC would be of benefit to young people to take them forward.

2. *Should FTC commence a period of consolidation and promotion in its community development work on completing projects already started?*

Frome Town Council has taken on a responsibility to develop continuing relationships with local people that inform the priorities within the town.

In a recent Wellbeing Panel meeting, there was a push for supporting community development from the bottom up, at street level working alongside successful local projects such as Mendip Health Connections, Active and in Touch, Frome Cares, End of life care, the housing associations and Fair Frome.

By putting more resources into the three local communities from the Community Connections project it might be possible to learn more thoroughly what conditions need to be in place to build relationships in these neighbourhoods, learn from this and then roll it out to other areas in Frome.

Trinity Park, one of the three in the Community Connections project, has given us the beginnings of an insight into some of the issues facing new communities. As the new housing estates on the former police station site, at Southfield Farm near Asda and between Culverhill and Blatchbridge are built, there may be opportunities to embed some of the learnings and other FTC initiatives, supporting fledgling communities.

3. *Should we put more resources and support into this work in new neighbourhoods and what FTC initiatives could we include?*

One of the recommendations of Participate Frome was that 'Frome Town Council finds a balance between delivering practical action in the town and increasing support to enable strategic social development.' Strategic social development is potentially long term and time-consuming work. With slower development, we have to pace our interventions in order to find a balance between short, medium and long-term benefits. It will require long term commitment from FTC.

4. *What are the advantages and disadvantages of developing longer term work at neighbourhood level?*