

## Agenda item 6

### For information: Volunteer Frome

Author: Kate Hellard, Community Projects Officer

#### Summary

This information report outlines the work to date on Volunteer Frome, the role of the key organisations and identifies the next steps to increase the reach and success of the project in the coming year.

Volunteer Frome is a project contracted by FTC to SPARK who deliver a virtual and physical volunteer base for Frome. It was agreed at Town Matters on 26 September 2016 that the contract would include the provision of the following at an annual cost of £16k for three years:

1. Volunteering/DBS drop-in service (6 hours per week)
2. Distribution of regular e-newsletters to volunteers and organisations (minimum of 1 per month)
3. The provision of a template volunteer handbook that could form the basis of a support and guidance structure for groups and volunteers
4. Training of FTC information centre staff to answer inquiries throughout the rest of the week.
5. Delivery of training events (6 per year) for volunteers and organisations
6. Database management, brokerage and promotion.

The project has an emphasis on working with organisations to increase their capacity to deliver services in Frome through the recruitment of volunteers by promoting the benefits of volunteering to residents. It provides a platform which matches potential volunteers with current opportunities, collates and enables information sharing and offers support and guidance to individuals and organisations.

Since January 2017 Kate Hellard the FTC Community Projects Officer and Rachel Griffin the FTC Marketing and Communications Manager have worked closely with Denise Timmins, Sharon Blyth and Katherine Nolan from SPARK to create, develop and build the project which is now live.

There are currently (at the time of writing); 41 organisations registered on the site, 60 live volunteer opportunities, 73 local people registered as looking for a volunteer role. 21 residents have been matched with volunteer roles.

The steering group, comprising of project sponsor Cllr Ali Barclay and representatives of each of the two Frome Rotary Clubs, Frome Lions and Andrew Lee has met on a regular basis to guide and inform the project, providing practical help and support where necessary.

SPARK have developed a bespoke database with Plymouth Guild for Frome which sits behind the <https://volunteerfrome.org/> website created by FTC. The management and ownership of the database sits with SPARK, who manage the day to day running of the site and deal with any technical issues, which in the first four months were many! We have set up an email address which is answered by staff at SPARK Monday to Friday who have also created Facebook and Twitter accounts to promote the project, that they manage and administer.

Denise is now in Frome on the first Wednesday of every month to provide DBS support and advice to groups and individuals and Sharon Blythe is here every Wednesday to work with groups and organisations to offer specific advice and support around policies and procedures relating to volunteers. She is approaching key organisations in the town, starting with the theatres and sports clubs, to engage them in Volunteer Frome and provide practical support in signing up, logging in and promoting the project to their volunteers.

In August, we identified a gap in the support that we currently offer individuals in accessing information about Volunteer Frome, signing up and starting their volunteer journey. To address this, we have worked with SPARK to ensure that the roles are clear and we will be training FTC information staff so that they have clear up to date information on referring residents who either phone or come into either of the two information points.

Next steps to increasing the number of volunteers, signed up to Volunteer Frome:

### **Marketing**

The project has its own branding and identity and we have created a communications plan to increase the reach of the project through local marketing publicity and communications, supported by postcards, pens, banners and t-shirts. Both FTC and SPARK staff will be meeting to create and agree a series of media campaigns that attract a younger profile of volunteer to VF.

### **Engaging Business**

FTC are making links to VF through other areas of work, specifically businesses. A couple of larger businesses have inquired about how they can be supported to provide volunteering days for their employees to volunteer in Frome as part of their corporate social responsibility and we are also looking at the possibility of a VF Business Breakfast.

### **Training**

Through the partnership we have created a series of training opportunities for both volunteers, staff and trustees about volunteering which are delivered as part of the Community Groups Training Programme. The training covers practical subjects aimed at how organisations can recruit and support volunteers, including young volunteers.

### **Volunteer Coordinator Forum**

Responding to requests from local organisations for a mechanism for peer to peer support in recruiting and managing volunteers, Sharon has initiated a new Volunteer Coordinators forum which will meet on a regular basis with a view to this forum becoming self-sustaining in the future.

### **Town Hall and Information Point**

To ensure that all staff and volunteers can respond to enquiries regarding VF with the correct information, we could consider the purchase a tablet for public use so that people can be supported to log into and register on Volunteer Frome. This is subject to budget constraints at the moment.

### **Conclusion**

The project is taking shape with a good, but improvable, number of organisations signed up. The focus in the coming months will be on recruiting volunteers and promoting the possibilities to a new demographic of Frome residents including younger professionals.