

Agenda item 7

For information - Volunteer Frome update

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Summary

This report provides an update on work to date to create and deliver a volunteer base for Frome. Volunteer Frome continues to make steady progress and FTC and SPARK are working closely to continue to improve the service for residents and organisations.

SPARK have been contracted by FTC, since April 2017, to set up and manage a volunteer base for Frome which acts as a brokerage service for new volunteers and voluntary and not-for-profit organisations in the town. This is the second year of the three year, £16k per year, contract. Together with FTC, SPARK have established an online platform and developed a face to face service to support organisations and volunteers through training, advice and support. SPARK are using this project as a pilot for 'place based' volunteering in Somerset. There is interest in the project from other towns as well as SCC, who have traditionally had a focus on county wide volunteering projects.

As reported to Town Matters in September 2017, the service is up and running with a steady increase in organisations and potential volunteers signing up through the online portal. It was noted that the service was improvable and that we would look to focus on recruiting a new demographic of young volunteers.

To address this, and to increase the capacity of their team to deliver the service in Frome, SPARK applied for additional funding through the Youth Action Fund. In a change from the previous staffing arrangement within SPARK, Helen Fielden was recruited by them to deliver and develop the service and she started in February 2018. Helen is based in Frome, providing vital local knowledge and contact for the service and has a focus on recruiting young people into volunteering opportunities.

The overall aims of the project are now:

1. To identify and develop exciting volunteering opportunities in Frome for young people aged 10-20 years.
2. To embed and encourage volunteering by young people within organisations working with young people (schools, youth provision, etc).
3. To increase awareness of VF within the town.
4. To develop a model for place-based volunteering in Frome.

Helen is addressing these through a series of objectives and has noted the following key achievements from February 18 to date:

- Development of project plan for the coming year.
- Two meetings with sixth formers at Frome College that have laid the foundations for Young People's Steering Group. More meetings are planned for June.

- Attended Frome Youth Club and have an appointment scheduled to meet young people on courses at Somerset Skills and Learning.
- Meeting with Year 9 Duke of Edinburgh's Award students to talk about their experiences of volunteering.
- Attended Mayhem in the Meadow for networking with partner organisations and some on the spot brokerage.
- Meetings with several organisations and discussed the possibility of them working with young volunteers. So far, the following organisations have expressed an interest: Friends of Frome Hospital, Discover Frome Information Point, Purple Elephant and Fair Frome
- Building good working relationships with FTC colleagues.
- Helen will be involved in delivery of the National Citizens Service programme this summer to enable the longevity of any projects that students start and offer volunteering opportunities for graduates from the scheme.
- Delivery of training on working with young volunteers

This is an example of the role Helen has played in supporting young people and the value of volunteering to them:

“A young man was referred to me by Health Connections. He suffers from Chronic Fatigue and anxiety. We discussed what volunteering times and activities might best suit his condition and his planned return to college. We decided that half a day of gardening a week would be good. I was able to put him in touch with Phoenix House to help maintain their communal garden.”

In addition, SPARK continues to deliver training sessions as part of our programme of training for community groups and manage and maintain the VF database, a newsletter for organisations and individuals and manage social media and the website.

Our contract with SPARK also includes a DBS checking service. This was intended to form part of the volunteering drop-in service that would operate from the Town Hall on a weekly basis. As general foot fall into the Town Hall is less than originally anticipated this service has been adapted. Helen now works from the Town Hall one day per week and alongside Mendip Health Connections on a regular basis. This enables her to be more responsive to events and opportunities to meet volunteers and is hoping to build a regular 'surgery' at Frome College alongside Charlie Orr who is working to deliver the apprenticeship scheme for Frome.

Groups are still able to access the Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) through SPARK remotely and in the last year they have managed 25 DBS applications for Frome organisations.

Following a contract meeting recently, it was agreed that SPARK would undertake a comprehensive review of Volunteer Frome, over the next month, which would include a facilitated, half day workshop to explore the experience of users of the service. It is anticipated that the review will identify the strengths and weaknesses of the project and inform the development of the service.