

Agenda item 4

For information – Ideas to support Frome’s Recovery

Author: Peter Wheelhouse, Economic Development & Regeneration Manager & Deputy Town Clerk

Summary

The purpose of this report is to share information on ideas that emerged from a series of Recovery Panels that were held in June. The Management Group is considering how these ideas can be incorporated within the Council’s Work Programme and firm recommendations will be presented as soon as possible to Council.

Background

The work on recovery planning has been led by a councillor Working Group supported by the Deputy Town Clerk and the Marketing & Communications Manager. At an early stage, we felt it was important to engage with the community to help inform where we should concentrate our efforts. In May at the height of the lockdown, the community was encouraged to take part in a household survey, ‘What Next for Frome.’ There were 482 responses.

The biggest challenges were identified as: missing family and friends; grocery shopping; issues relating to employment and personal finance. Respondents felt that there were some positive aspects to lockdown – the most popular responses included: neighbours and a growing sense of community; less traffic and more walking and cycling. The biggest areas that we were encouraged to focus on included: helping local businesses; supporting walking and cycling; protecting the environment; supporting children and families; improving the town centre.

The trends from the survey were shared with a number of Recovery Panels to stimulate discussion about creative solutions. Those panels comprised representatives of both the community and the Council and included:

- Transport Group
- Community Organisations Group
- Neighbourhood networks Group
- Vocational Training Group
- Business Recovery Panel
- Frome Arts Forum Panel
- Resources Group

What follows are the ideas that emerged from those discussions:

Transport Group

- Safer cycling routes
- Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan
- Expand on cycle confidence classes and Dr Bike repair workshops

- More e-bikes and hire to local businesses
- Maps showing cycle routes
- Expand the existing Active Travel Programme to encourage more walking and cycling to school and work etc.
- Clean air network – monitoring pollution levels across the town to identify where action is needed
- Creative ideas to support drivers to slow down

Community Organisations Group

- Free school meals through holidays
- Develop an accessible information point in the town for the homeless
- Plug service gaps
- Digital inclusion – address the need for better access to Wi-Fi, laptops, tablets and training
- Volunteers –re-purposing our new band of volunteers
- Consider how Drug & Alcohol services can be improved

Neighbourhood Networks Group

- ‘Wild About Frome’ – identify green spaces that neighbourhoods can claim and manage
- Conflict resolution training to address difficult issues that emerge in neighbourhoods
- Sharing resources - noticeboards in gardens
- Possibility of umbrella insurance for streets / networks and other support possibly through the Mayor’s Grant to support local community events
- Develop a peer-to-peer platform where network activators can talk to each other, share ideas and ask each other questions

Business Recovery Panel

- Enable hospitality businesses to trade on the street and in some open spaces in the town centre to address the constraints of small premises
- Consider how pop-up shops could be supported in major venues such as the Cheese & Grain
- Develop a ‘Deliver Frome’ service for hospitality businesses similar to Deliveroo
- Make the town centre more attractive
- Work with training providers (on the Vocational Training Group) to support businesses that are struggling to recruit including the development of new apprenticeship schemes
- Work with training providers (on the Vocational Training Group) to address the growing demand for digital skills
- Develop a growing and training centre working with Field to Fork

Vocational Training Group

- Create a page on FTC website with information and links to training opportunities relevant to residents in Frome (including distance learning)
- Survey of local businesses to find out what they feel their current training needs/skill gaps are over the next 1 – 3 years
- Provide information about training for people who are not online
- Webinar around wellbeing and meaningful employment (incorporating upskilling)

Frome Arts Forum Recovery Panel

- Support collaborative efforts and re-engage the group to share learning
- Connect with 'What Next for Frome' - looking at culture, policy, and advocacy regionally and nationally
- Identify the economic value of local cultural organisations with a Frome Cultural Impact Survey & make infographic to engage support from wider community, lobby MP etc.
- Support local organisations to deliver outside events when rules allow
- Promote Frome Performers without other opportunities through busking and Online performance platform similar to Bristol arts channel
- Revive 'Frome Busks'

Resources Group

- Lockdown will reduce incomes and increase fuel poverty next winter. Bulk insulation programmes and projects such as Healthy Homes by Prescription need to be key focus of our work in this area.
- Promote and support resource sharing in light of reduced income and need to reduce waste, e.g. SHARE, community fridge
- Repair programme including directory of local repairers, advice and repair cafes
- Landscape Sensitivity Analysis to enable us to identify areas for food growing, renewables and tree planning and to feed into the Local Plan (a separate item on this agenda)

Next steps

Many of these ideas are already being taking forward in the context of the Council's existing Work Programme or by other organisations in the community. In other cases, new resources or a diversion of staff effort will be necessary to take these ideas forward.

The Council's Management Group are currently in the process of reviewing the Work Programme in the light of the outcomes of this work on Recovery and firm recommendations will be presented to Council as soon as possible.