

## Agenda item 7

### For information - Community Development Update

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#### Summary

This report provides an overview of the Community Development work delivered by FTC in the last six months and an outline of the next steps.

#### Background

When we last updated council in October 2019 and we discussed the various merits of extending our Community Development work out of the trinity area of Frome and into a new area, possibly Stonebridge. It was agreed at that meeting that councillors would prefer for us to continue to focus on building the support in Trinity whilst considering how best to support groups across the town.

Alongside the pilot project in Trinity, I have been studying for an MSC in Community Regeneration (which I have now passed). Part of the research involved exploring how community groups can be built and developed at the street level. The results of this research have influenced the way we have built upon the Trinity pilot taking into consideration the importance, in building communities, of street level activity and practical action, whilst recognising the individuality of each street or neighbourhood. We learnt that what works in one neighbourhood might not necessarily in another and therefore care must be taken when looking to roll out or scale up activity. The qualities of the community development practitioner are key to supporting and building relationships of mutuality and trust.

Furthermore, we have learnt that the role of FTC is one to hold gently as we seek to build on the assets already held with in a neighbourhood, rather than to impose ideas or action onto residents living within them.

#### Action

In February, we started to deliver a series of peer support sessions for neighbourhood networks. The first had a focus on closing streets for playing out and street parties. The aim was to build a supportive network where representatives of street and neighbourhood groups could advise, question, build and share ideas, examples of good practice and initiatives.

*‘Four participants realised during the evening that they all lived in the same street! They walked home together enthused by plans for a street event, and with a range of talents and interests that would help them put it together. Although lockdown thwarted these plans, they are hopeful about putting something on in the future, and in the meantime, they have been in regular contact with the street, checking in on neighbours and sharing out gluts of courgettes between them.’*

Covid-19 accelerated the growth of street networks across Frome. They played a critical part of the town's response to the March lockdown, providing practical and other support for each other as neighbours. They met over WhatsApp, Facebook, or email and many enjoyed the chance to get outside and clap on Thursdays for the NHS, using this as an opportunity to check in on each other. Others have shared puzzles, board games, plants, and seeds.

At the end of July, we secured National Lottery funding for a temporary role of Community Development Projects Officer of 28.5 hrs per week for six months. Hannah Stopford was seconded into this role and since August has provided additional support to the neighbourhood and street groups.

Representatives from neighbourhood groups are signing up to the FTC mapping activity, providing a chance to see how much of the town is covered. Many of these 'activators' have started to come together on a regular Zoom gathering to discuss ideas and issues and support each other as street level community groups. Part of Hannah's role is to support this networking group develop, as well as link in new groups and support residents to form new groups.

Every street is unique, and every group has different interests, needs, and offers. In the last two months we have:

- Attended the networking zoom meetings providing admin and research support
- Supported a group of activators who are keen to identify and shape visions, aims and goals for the networking group going forwards.
- Started to flesh out a programme of training and workshops of interest to neighbourhood group members.
- Met with street group representatives who don't take part in the zoom meetings to record how they see themselves making use of a wider network and what they would like from it.
- Planned events and engagement activity to draw in people who either haven't started a group yet or haven't signed theirs up to the network. (e.g. Window Wanderland, door-knocking and working across other FTC projects such as Wild About Trees)
- Liaised with other organisations to see how the network might work alongside/with, for example Mendip Health Connections.
- Supported a community litter pick in the Trinity area.
- Shared information via a Neighbourhood Network newsletter, including neighbourhood stories to illustrate how different they are.
- Attended Connect 5 training that could be used to cascade to the wider neighbourhood network with a view to skilling up neighbours in compassionate conversations around mental health.

Throughout this period, we have worked particularly closely with Annabelle McFadyen, a Frome resident and street 'activator' who volunteers to support the Neighbourhood Network, ensuring that the network maintains its peer to peer ethos, providing support to facilitate the meetings and enable it flourish.

## Next steps

We will promote the development of new street and neighbourhood networks in Frome, being careful not to impose a way of doing things, supporting the growth of mutual aid, connectedness, and practical action.

We will build on the actions above and look to support street parties, litter picks, gardening projects and playing out as soon as is possible with information, advice, practical support, and the loan of resources.

The Neighbourhood Network will continue to be supported by FTC and we will work with the members to provide relevant training opportunities, information sharing and practical resource for its members.

We are also looking to link the street and neighbourhood groups in other FTC activity such as School Streets, Wild about Trees and Litter Warriors.