

Agenda item 4

For information – an update on the work to support local businesses

Authors: Vivienne Whitaker, Project Officer and George Tomlinson, Marketing & Tourism Officer

Summary

The following report presents an update on our engagement with the business community to provide business support and advice.

Business Training and Networking Events

Although we have not been able to provide face-to-face business networking and training events since March 2020, we have been able to offer online sessions to keep businesses connected and on top of the skills and information they need. In February 2021, we ran an online workshop to help independent retailers market themselves more effectively. The event was targeted at independent shop owners and the new independent creators/ makers contacts we made through the launch of the virtual Christmas market in December 2020.

In March 2021, we held an online Women Mean Business event to celebrate International Women's Day. A panel of local businesswomen were invited to the event who were asked what inspired them to set up their business; how their business adapted, evolved, and survived during the pandemic; and what their top survival tip was for the past year in terms of self-resilience and self-care.

The Discuss & Do business events run by Frome Town Council and Frome Chamber of Commerce have continued to run online. Take up for the online events has proven very popular; however, we are also aware of businesses' eagerness to come together to network in person so have started planning a series of in-person training/ networking events for later in the year based on the following topics – Growing your business and funding (September); Taking on your first employee (November) and Streams of income using different types of content (December). The aim is to hold these in the Council Chamber where they can also be streamed for people to watch online if they are unable to attend in person.

Communications

The Business Bulletin has continued to be the main channel for circulating relevant business information out to local businesses. We ensure content is balanced between national support and advice, such as business grants and central Government schemes as well as highlighting more locally driven support, including business events and initiatives organised by Frome Town Council, Frome Chamber of Commerce and Edventure.

Regular contact has been maintained with retailers and the hospitality sector to ensure the Discover Frome listings are kept up to date. We have also used the information received to create a series of posts on Discover Frome as Covid restrictions have started to ease, such as hospitality reopening for outdoor dining, entertainment venues reopening etc.

Last month we relaunched the Discover Frome Facebook and Instagram accounts in a bid to further promote tourism in the town. The two channels will promote all elements featured on the Discover Frome site including retailers, food and drink, accommodation and events.

Next Steps

We temporarily put the Good Business visits on pause during the pandemic and are now keen to start visiting businesses again. The Good Business framework enables us to meet up with local businesses to learn more about their business, as well as offering the chance to explore together ways of helping reduce their environmental impact and connecting with the local community.

The Good Business framework is one way of extending our reach to more businesses, and we wish to explore more ways of ensuring we connect with a wide a range of businesses across the whole of Frome in terms of sectors and location.