

Agenda item 6

For discussion – Events

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Summary

The purpose of this report is to update the Council on the delivery of events, the reasons for doing them, the time commitment that it takes and what we are proposing for next year.

Introduction

Events are an important part of our Communication and Marketing strategy. They enable us to engage both with the community in interesting and varied ways, are a valuable outreach tool for increased participation, they support economic development and help to maintain a high profile. They also help to make people happy. The past 18 months have been challenging but interesting times for events as we navigate between digital, blended, and real live events.

There are a number of differing reasons for delivering and supporting events throughout the town. They include:

- Many of town events have huge cultural and community value, bringing people together for a shared experience
- They provide value as a keystone to our visitor offer, drawing people to the town and supporting local businesses.
- They are also an excellent way to engage with the community and share information
- Events also have the added value of ensuring that reputationally we are not the faceless council but that we are accessible and part of the rich fabric of our town
- They are designed to hit a number of strategic objectives of the council.

What should not be underestimated is the amount of cross team objectives that can be met through the shaping of a well-planned event. For example, Picnic in the park in Rodden Meadow and National Play Day both across our strategic objectives as they supported residents to enjoy our parks and open spaces, provide a sense of community, and a platform for the Play Strategy work through Children's Scrapstore. There were also engagement opportunities for our resilience work with the GHF team and CSE – so as well as the community enjoying themselves there were opportunities for meaningful connections and conversations. There were also opportunities for our officers to discuss other elements of our work too such as tree projects, neighbourhood networks and the Family Information Service - but inevitably means an enormous amount of staff input required as well as to ensure that.

Review of events in the current year

Over the last six months we have delivered and supported a number of excellent events; some planned and in the current work programme, some not. New elements included Picnic in the Meadow, Play Day, Great Big Green week which featured over 40 events, including three large FTC events and, of course, most recently, Glow in the Park. The rest you will see documented on the work programme. And they all have the hallmark of enabling good engaging which we should be rightly proud of.

Every year the work programme has a certain amount of flexibility as we take advantage of opportunities that are presented to us. There also a few planned events, which appeared a good idea when the work programme for the coming year was agreed in January, which will not occur. Examples of this in this current financial year are: the Graffiti Festival that was developed around the Skate Park Fundraiser and Play day instead of being stand alone; the History Festival cancelled by partners; and, the Business Festival that the Frome Chamber of Commerce felt wasn't enough support from within the business community at this time.

Similarly, some events need to be postponed such as our annual conference, which will be branded as *Accelerate* and is now planned to take place after the unitary elections in May 2022 (assuming this date remains firm).

Some events also just run their course. Fiverfest, for example, has been successful in the past but, most recently, not all businesses took part while those that did reported limited additional footfall. It seems likely that we'll need to explore with businesses another way of increasing footfall.

Highlights still to come include Frome Busks which this year will be supported by Frome College, and the Christmas Lantern Parade along with the Christmas Lights turn on. This year the latter will have the added value of the Frome Independent's A Little Night Market, allowing us to have move street for spectators.

Discussion

Events are resource intensive and it's important to try to assess the balance between this and the benefits (described above) they bring.

Events always require a lot of pre-planning work. For example, work has now started to deliver a Queen's platinum jubilee celebration for next June, despite it not making it onto the work programme last January. For Green Breather days, where we would close the Market Place to traffic on specific days in the year, require a lot of consultation around road closures, a lot of paperwork and procedures to be put in place. On the day, the resources to man the road closures need to be factored in too.

Staff are happy to chip in and support our events, but this does mean that they are unable to do other things that we would expect them to do as well. 24 staff worked on Glow in the Park on the day and an estimated 60 person days in the planning.

In addition to limited staff resources, we don't always have the expertise to deliver complex events. This is not always a problem given the expertise in the town, which is always willing to help, but usually needs paying for. In these cases we need to either prioritise an event and allocate a budget or only run the events subject to external finding.

The commitment to volunteering in our community is probably higher than in most other towns in the country, is something we celebrate continually and is one of the things that makes Frome different and very special. Volunteers are essential to the smooth running of many events but there are tasks that have to be paid for to give us and the police confidence that road closures, for example, will be safely manned.

To illustrate this point, for Glow in the Park we worked with the Rotary Clubs to provide volunteers for the event (and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them publicly as we certainly could not have done it without them). We needed forty volunteers but in the end only 20 were able to make the event. This put pressure on the staff team, and we had to reassign roles during the event. Safety wasn't compromised but it did feel a bit worrying at times.

It is also clear that partnership working is the way forward: There is no way that we would have been able to deliver Glow in the Park without the Rotary Club's support, and two thirds of the events in Great Big Green Week were bought to us by others. Next year, it is 10 years since we worked with FROGS to install the pump track and a brand new play park at Welshmill. FROGS would like to celebrate this, which would be great. This may mean that we take the decision to support FROGS on that event rather than delivering Picnic in the Meadow, for example.

Next year

Taking into account the points made above, we are looking to a number of events where we expect to work in partnership with others. Usually, this will mean that we insure the event and retain control of health safety.

The events and the partnerships that we are currently looking to deliver next year are below. We are confident that we can deliver these and are working with the finance team to build the budget proposal for Cllrs to consider over the winter. As I said above, we are always up for taking on new events suggestions, but we will have to consider what events will need to be cancelled as a result of taking on new ones.

- Apple day
- Accelerate (already in the planning)
- Business Festival – Frome Chamber of Commerce
- Community event - Jubilee
- Christmas Light Switch on
- Christmas promotion event
- Cycling Event – with partners
- Frome Busks – partner with Frome College
- Green Breather days
- Great Big Green week – partner with Sustainable Frome – FTC having one flagship event
- History festival – Partner with FSLS, Museum
- Made differently days - FTC engagement days, seminars
- Park Event – Partner with FROGS
- Remembrance – Partner with BRLS
- Walking festival – Partner Walkers are Welcome
- Womens Conference – Partner engaging women & C&G
- Visitor conference – Visit Somerset

Conclusion

Well planned events should be fun, an excellent way of engaging and reaching residents and achieving many objectives across the team. However, every event needs imagining, shaping and organising; it needs marketing to ensure that there are a good number of targeted residents in attendance; it needs an enormous commitment in terms of Health and Safety input, risk assessing and ensuring that the event is safety secured on the day; and most events are extremely staff heavy.

We need to ensure that we deliver safe, interesting and fun events which achieve objectives across the board that can be delivered in a planned and timely way. I think we should be asking ourselves not whether we can or whether we want to do an event, because we mostly can and always want to, but instead really focus on making sure we have the capacity and enough lead in time to put on a good event as well as deciding on what event we are not going to be able to do as a result.