

Minutes of a meeting of Frome Town Council

Wednesday 9 August 2023, 7pm
Frome Town Hall and Zoom

Present:

In the Town Hall: Fiona Barrows, Philip Campagna (Chair), Anita Collier, Nick Dove, Mark Dorrington, Anne Hills, Andy Jones, Polly Lamb, Lisa Merryweather, Ben Still, Steve Tanner, Mel Usher, Andy Wrintmore

In attendance:

Paul Wynne (Town Clerk), Rachel Griffin (Marketing & Communications Manager), Jane Llewellyn (Planning and Development Manager), Peter Wheelhouse (Deputy Town Clerk and Economic Development and Regeneration Manager), Sean Powell (Town Hall Steward), Laura Flaherty (Executive Assistant to the Town Clerk and Mayor, online)

7 members of the public were in attendance at Frome Town Hall

2 members of the public were in attendance on Zoom.

To watch to the discussion in full visit: www.youtube.com/watch?v=r7COai5nSU4

Minute Ref	Agenda Item	Action
2023/63/FC	<p>The meeting started at 7pm.</p> <p>1a. Apologies for absence There were no FTC Cllrs present via Zoom.</p> <p>Andy Jones proposed to accept apologies from Sara Butler and Carla Collenette, seconded by Anita Collier, agreed unanimously.</p> <p>1b. Declaration of members' interests None was received</p> <p>1c. Minutes from the last meeting on 12 July 2023 The minutes of the Frome Town Council meeting held on 12 July 2023 were approved as a true record of the meeting and signed by the Chair.</p> <p>Proposed by Anne Hills, seconded by Mark Dorrington, agreed unanimously.</p>	
2023/64/FC	<p>2. Question from public and Cllrs, including Somerset Cllrs Andy Jones asked for an update on the Victoria Park toilets. Jane Llewellyn explained they had to be closed at short notice due to vandalism. The refurbishment of the toilets was due to start on 4 September and the hope was the project would be</p>	

	<p>completed between 8 – 10 weeks. Jane noted temporary toilets were being researched.</p> <p>Anita Collier, acknowledging the road accidents in Frome including the recent fatality, asked if pressure could be put on Somerset Council to think about improved safety measures on the bypass and turn to Asda. She noted it was a notorious and dangerous spot. Paul Wynne confirmed he would write to the director of Highways.</p> <p>Nick Dove noted his thanks to the Frome Times for covering the issue of rats on Palmer Street. Although the accompanying photo made it look like the rats came from the private gate on Paul Street which was not the case. An amendment was being requested with the Frome Times.</p>	PWY
2023/65/FC	<p>3. For decision - Update on the unitary programme Max Wide provided a summary of the report.</p> <p>Max explained at the start of the process FTC wanted to develop its relationship with Somerset Council to one based on co-operation, common goals and mutual advantage. The aim was to create a deal that was a win win for all concerned.</p> <p>Max noted that within the unitary process there was always centralisation and devolution. From around the country, Cornwall was probably the best example of where centralising and devolution had worked. Somerset Council policy is to devolve assets and responsibilities where appropriate. Although the detail of this is not yet clear. Somerset is facing huge financial pressure and services are likely be cut further to make savings. Max questioned whether the theory of merging district and county councils into one unitary does in practice result in savings. And an ever increasing demand for mandatory social services probably dwarfs any savings anyway. Max suggested that we were seeing the necessary re-emergence of an era of localism. An example of localism is the investing locally in prevention of ill health and loneliness that has been shown to reduce hospital admissions. Max explained FTC needed to reimagine our role with the addition of assets, budgets and responsibilities.</p> <p>The Frome unitary deal would focus on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frome cultural quarter and open spaces • Early help and prevention • County Council needs and goals <p>Max explained the tests for new deals would be:</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duty of best value • Reduce costs as well as improved services and outcomes • Significant local support and active backing for the idea • Realistic and achievable with clear, practical and tangible action for delivery <p>Max acknowledged that FTC were not where we need to be. It was going to take focused effort and time. There was a need for help to develop the work further and Max's recommendation was to commission someone to do this business planning work.</p> <p>Max then gave an update on the Local Community Networks. They were the local voice and would involve other organisations. They did not have budgets or powers but could become strong forums for voices to be heard. They would discuss common themes and issues across the area and look at local solutions.</p> <p>Max looked at the parishes involved in the Frome Area LCN and their involvement. He said it was key not to think of it as Frome centric. At the last meeting it was agreed to re-engage parishes who had not been involved much or at all. There was a desire to run meetings in vibrant way and create themes, meaning people could come for what interests them.</p> <p>Max demonstrated upcoming priorities for the LCN. He categorised them as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dragons – these were tricky issues lurking in places that needed help to deal with them, i.e. People for Packsaddle. Big issue but one area, not for the LCN • Newts – everywhere, but can be picked up easily i.e. sports, SASP developing provision across area • Elephants – big issues that affect everyone i.e. broad issue of growth and housing needs and integrated developments like Selwood Community Garden, there could be a role of for LCN • Family pets – not to be worked out across the whole area, just for each parish. <p>Fiona Barrows queried that the plan for engagement hadn't come from the community. Max acknowledged Fiona's point; he explained that often people want what they know rather than what they need. He said if you asked what assets people would like, they wouldn't know what to say. Max explained it was about creating a series of options and testing them.</p>	
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	<p>Fiona also asked about the budget for the unitary work. Max explained it was not simply about money but about expertise. Paul Wynne also noted that there was not a revenue budget allocated to the work, just time and that was why the proposal was to use the funds from the ear marked reserve to commission the business planning.</p> <p>Nick Dove asked about the work of previous consultants who has looked at the opportunities from unitary. Max explained that their recommendations were still being used.</p> <p>Lisa Merryweather noted services would continue to struggle, and she would welcome the opportunity to do some more research to be clear on the issues. And to make sure it was impactful across a large part of the population.</p> <p>Mel Usher said there was a need to get ahead of the game. His opinion was that it was worth using £20k, as it would serve FTC well to get some of the things off the ground.</p> <p>The recommendations were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note the progress and next steps on the delivery of the work programme in the table above 2. Delegate to the Town Clerk, in consultation with Cllr Wide and Cllr Merryweather, to commission a business plan to enable Council to understand the opportunities and implications of a Town Devolution Deal using up to £20k from EMR 358. 3. Report back with update on progress to November Council <p>Proposed by Nick Dove, seconded by Andy Jones, agreed by majority. Fiona Barrows abstained.</p>	<p>PWY/MW PWY/MW</p>
2023/66/FC	<p>4. For decision - Why Frome Town Council should declare a housing crisis</p> <p>A summary of the report was given by Polly Lamb.</p> <p>Following her presentation Polly proposed an addition (in italics below) to recommendation 2:</p> <p>"Develop an action plan based on the nine points in the report above <i>and return to Council in October for approval alongside current actions in the work programme that could be cancelled or postponed</i>"</p> <p>Proposed Polly Lamb, seconded by Nick Dove, agreed by majority. Mel Usher abstained.</p>	

	<p>Anita Collier asked if there was any scope for talking to the big builders about how they interpret plans and what the difficulties are for them to adhering to 40% affordable housing. Steve Tanner explained in the past they had seen developers use viability assessments to lower social housing. He felt 40% should be achievable target, and something FTC should press strongly.</p> <p>A member of the public made a passionate plea that FTC did declare a housing crisis and spoke of the experiences of other residents.</p> <p>Max Wide was concerned about FTC becoming a social housing provider but felt it would be right for Frome Area Community Land Trust (FACLT) to do so. He said FTC should be looking at feasibility before putting together an action plan.</p> <p>Lisa Merryweather said FTC had identified a need, but there was also a need to get a better understanding. The proposed nine actions to be explored was a good starting point. Lisa felt FTC should look at bringing in other parts of the community, the responsibility shouldn't fall on FTC. She said Frome should work as a community to solve a problem that affects the community.</p> <p>Ali Barclay, director of FACLT, asked for more support from FTC and suggested each could act as resource for each other.</p> <p>Mel Usher said climate was the crisis and FTC should concentrate on that. He didn't want to raise expectations and didn't want to be a to be housing provider. Mel asked to see more data specific to Frome to understand the issue better.</p> <p>There was a discussion about some other options to help ease the issue such as Home Share.</p> <p>Janine Nash noted developers drip feed land to keep house prices up which was a major problem. Janine suggested FTC look at other forms of developing, finding alternative ways of funding, more innovative ways to develop the same but deliver on promises. She suggested inviting more developers with a social conscience.</p> <p>Tim Cutting, director of FACLT, asked Cllrs to back the declaration despite questions of feasibility.</p> <p>Max Wide proposed to revise the second recommendation from</p>	
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	<p>"Develop an action plan based on the nine points in the report above and return to Council in October for approval alongside current actions in the work programme that could be cancelled or postponed" to:</p> <p><i>"Look into the feasibility of a plan based on the nine points in the report and potentially other ideas and return to Council in October. "</i></p> <p>Seconded by Anne Hills, agreed by majority. Lisa Merryweather abstained.</p> <p>1. Declares a housing crisis.</p> <p>Proposed by Anita Collier, seconded by Nick Dove, agreed by majority. Mel Usher abstained</p> <p>2. Look into the feasibility of a plan based on the nine points in the report and potentially other ideas and return to Council in October.</p> <p>Proposed by Andy Jones, seconded by Polly Lamb, agreed by majority. Lisa Merryweather abstained.</p>	PL
2023/67/FC	The next meeting will be at 7pm on Wednesday 6 September 2023, Frome Town Hall and Zoom	

The Chair closed the meeting at 8.54pm