

Cllr Martin Dimery Frome West, Somerset Council

Report for Frome Town Council: May 2023

To all members of Frome Town Council and for public release.

Introduction:

It has been suggested that Somerset Councillors representing Frome submit reports on the work they are carrying out on behalf of the residents and for the Town Council's information.

I have previously attempted to achieve this by attending Frome Town Council meetings without the need to go into the detail that would detract from the essential business of council.

At the last FTC meeting, I attended on-line, following a long day attending a meeting in Taunton.

Unfortunately, when I did put up my virtual hand to provide points of information, it wasn't noticed. I did not persist as the subject matter had moved on. There was no comments box. I did give written feedback through another channel, which I hope was passed on.

There followed a vote of thanks for those providing written reports and a comment passed that it was also preferable that "Green Party Councillors" also provided written reports. This could be taken as an implicit criticism, failing to reflect the hard work all of us are doing on behalf of the people of Frome. Collectively, we have regularly attended FTC meetings, and I personally have attended probably more frequently than any other councillor in the last 6 years. Singling out one political party in a public meeting without giving them the right to reply is unacceptable.

It also seems to me that while written reports can be useful, they can also prove something of a self-justification exercise for those of us already extremely busy attempting to represent Frome and its parishes.

So, I will provide the following information in the hope it is read and noted. In future, I will not have the time to duplicate much of the content and will attempt to keep updates relevant, topical, and to the point.

I am on leave for the FTC next meeting, so would appreciate any responses in writing.

Committees: As well as Full Council, I am on the following committees with a brief resume of what they do and current issues:

Climate and Place Scrutiny:

Having previously been Chair of the Environment Scrutiny committee, I have now been appointed Chair of its replacement committee in the new unitary structure. The remit is very

extensive. We are required to scrutinise the council's environmental and ecological policies and practices, and those of outside bodies like Wessex Water; quarrying companies; Areas of Natural Beauty (eg. Mendip, Quantocks); highways; school and county property service construction; farms; as well as flooding, peat extraction, waste collection and disposal; woodland management; Hinkley construction etc. etc...all in the context of Climate policy.

In future I have authorised these meetings to be held in each of the regional offices (eg. former districts) on a rotating basis.

For reports on progress in each area of consideration, I recommend viewing minutes or recordings published on the Somerset.gov website.

Members are required to attend these meetings in person.

Somerset Planning East:

With the demise of Mendip, a Planning Board has been re-established as "Somerset East" and works from the former Mendip offices in Shepton Mallet. Thirteen councillors, including myself and three others from Frome, will sit on Planning in future. All have been required to undergo specific training. Thanks largely to the lobbying of my Green Party colleague, Helen Kay, the original plan to decide larger planning applications for over ten houses or more centrally in Taunton has been withdrawn, and now all major planning developments will be decided regionally. So Saxonvale and Selwood Garden Community will be back in the hands of more local councillors. If there are disagreements between officers and members, then the applications will be referred to the Strategic Planning Committee at County Hall.

Members are required to attend these meetings in person.

Standards:

This committee recommends regulations for council members' standards of conduct and expectations. Currently, work is being done to encourage all town and parish councils to sign up to the Nolan Principles and a full survey of all parishes has been conducted to this end. Elected committee members are also required to preside at the Members Appeals Committee as and when members are judged to have breached usual codes of conduct.

Members are required to attend these meeting in person.

Members Equality Steering Group:

This committee constructively debates and monitors standards of equality across the council for members, staff and the public.

These meetings are conducted on-line.

Officer Appeals Committee:

This panel sits in judgement if an officer has appealed against disciplinary action taken against them. Three councillors are required to attend, drawn from a pool of nine.

These occasions are irregular, but members need to attend in person.

As Leader of the Green group, I also attend the Group Leaders meetings at the invitation of the Council Leader. I also am scheduled to meet with the Chief Executive on a regular basis.

These meetings are held on-line.

Selwood Parish Council/ Frome Town Council:

There is an expectation to attend these meetings and I do so, whenever possible, although there are some clashes in scheduling.

Local Community Network:

I continue to attend these meetings.

Full Council:

Meetings of Full Council take place a minimum of four or five times a year, and now are held in Bridgwater or Yeovil as the Shire Hall in Taunton is no longer big enough to accommodate all members, officers, public and press.

Some current public issues:

Introduction of experimental plastic film recycling in parts of Frome only. It is hoped the trial will lead to a full roll out across the county.

Imminent planning application for extension of Westdown Quarry/ Asham Woods.

Imminent Saxonvale development decision.

Imminent Selwood Garden Community development.

Imminent Packsaddle development.

Marston Park Development application.

Tree cutting to clear obstruction on Egford Hill (scheduled).

Unauthorised tree clearance at Tytherington Copse. (Action taken- case ongoing).

Speeding signage Styles Hill (installed, further maintenance requested).

School signage Nunney Road (Resolved).

Misuse of South Parade residential parking (ongoing).

Review of Weymouth Road residential parking (ongoing).

Review of pedestrian crossing in town (ongoing).

Re-instatement or art installation at Frome College (in process).

Traffic signs installed in Coalash Lane (Implemented).

Many other engagements relating to personal and individual issues.

Outside bodies:

Regular liaison meetings with the Merlin Theatre, Cheese and Grain and Frome Festival, specifically over arts strategy funding, premises and car parks etc.

Communications:

Monthly column in The Leveller.

Bi-monthly column in The Frome Times.

Contact: martin.dimery@somerset.gov.uk