

## Agenda item 4

For decision - New arrangements for the community development team and the recruitment of two engagement officers

Authors: Paul Wynne Town Clerk; Hannah Stopford Engagement Lead; Nikki Cox Partnership Lead.

### Summary

This report brings Cllrs up to date on recent changes in the Community Development Team following the departure of the Community Development Manager. It summarises the participatory approach pioneered by FTC, lists the current and likely work that the team will be involved in and proposes to recruit two engagement officers which will result in a small net saving in the salary budget.

### The recent state of play

The work in the Community Development Team was organised into three sections and managed by the Community Development Manager:

1. community engagement and community group support
2. implementing the play strategy and playful town and supporting the some of the most vulnerable in our community via the Refugee Hub project
3. early intervention, esp. re children, young people and families. The latter has worked most recently on the LCN FIND project and building the case for devolution of early intervention services via Somerset Connect and the development of a Frome Community Hub.

Since the departure of the Community Development Manager it was decided by the Town Clerk in consultation with the Leader not to replace her and to take the opportunity to develop two posts within the team to take on joint responsibility for this area of work. This is low risk as they have the skills to achieve this. There is now an Engagement Lead - Hannah Stopford - and a Partnership Lead - Nikki Cox. This structure creates a two-way split:

1. Engagement across the community, utilising existing quantitative data, and new collecting qualitative and quantitative data specific to the Frome Area LCN, Frome, and neighbourhood level as appropriate. This will feed in to specific projects (the development of the next FTC strategy and the LCN, for example) as well as support other areas of the organisation where we need to engage professionally, in the right way and in the right places.
2. The partnership side of the team will continue to develop our work around supporting the rest of FTC in its work around promoting play, supporting children and young people as well as working in partnership with Somerset Council and other local partners to develop Frome's community support objectives.

Central to the work of the Community Development Team is engaging with the community. FTC is committed to a participatory way of working, and supporting projects that are WITH and BY the community, rather than TO or FOR. Real engagement will ensure that we can be confident in

knowing what matters to the people who live here and give backbone to the reputation that FTC has for understanding its community.

Both parts of the Community Development Team should be considered to be two sides of the same coin and the new structure will work well because the two more senior posts, in particular, will collaborate and complement each other as they do already.

FTC will be poised to take action when opportunities present themselves because we will already know the landscape and dynamics that surround situations in the town. Because our engagement is grounded in an asset-based approach, resulting projects will be led by the community, thus increasing the scope of what is possible in our town and ensuring its sustainability.

Existing and probable new areas of work which all require the support of high quality community engagement include:

- Developing a qualitative and quantitative community led, evidence of need baseline that will be used for the basis of much of the work below and for the development of a new corporate Strategy - this team will lead on the whole of this piece of work.
- The increasing need to build community resilience in the light of lack of public sector funding
- The continuation of our climate change and biodiversity emergency work
- The expansion of our aims to improve public transport and promote active travel and addressing on road and off road parking
- Housing - the lack of existing or planned affordable rented and private housing for those in the community, improving the energy efficiency of existing housing,
- the Neighbourhood Plan revision
- devolution - of open space management, the cultural quarter and the commissioning of more early intervention services from SC
- the need to support the most vulnerable in the community with support on how to access public and third sector services. This is more than just signposting it includes supporting the family or individual through the various service providers. This will form the basis of our community hub offer (initially via a pilot in the town hall)
- developing FTC's early intervention (linked to the above point) programme.
- Improving the quality and the experience of visiting the town centre
- Improving our early years intervention - FIND, school support, co-ordination of services

Some of the above requires support from the community development team to other areas of the organisation while others require the lead of the community development team. To do so, a highly proficient community development team is vital to FTC's success.

The development of the Partnership Lead's side of the team is in progress and to an extent dependant on external funding which is likely to be successful imminently. As a result, it is proposed to come back to Council in the near future with proposals once the funding situation is certain. The remainder of this report focusses on the requirements of the Engagement Lead's side of the team.

The Engagement team would continue its work to embed a straightforward framework across the council's areas of work, supporting colleagues (internal and external) and Cllrs, taking the lead on

developing the new corporate strategy and ways of working. Community organisations will be supported in line with this framework, and grants committee supported to make decisions.

The Engagement Lead will require some back fill to retain and expand capacity and the proposal is to recruit two 0.8 FTE (4 days a week) community engagement officers.

Since the salary budget and staff chart was approved by Council in January the support provided by Somerset Council for LCN administration and development has increased and the Frome Area LCN support post that was approved is no longer needed in the same way and it is proposed not to recruit a specific LCN support post. However, it is highly likely that we will still want to continue to support the development of the LCN and some of the new engagement officers' time would be devoted to this. There is a grant scheme administered by SALC that could be applied for on behalf of the LCN that would enable the LCN to create a dedicated post to support its engagement but that is uncertain at the moment.

Not replacing the Community Development Manager, not recruiting the LCN post but recruiting two Engagement Officers will result in a net annual saving of approximately £10k. This provides a little flexibility if it is decided that further Frome Area LCN investment is required, for example.

**Recommendation**

Note the report and delegate to the Town Clerk and the Engagement Lead the recruitment of two 0.8 FTE permanent engagement officers as described in the report.