

Minutes of a meeting of Frome Town Council

Wednesday 17 January 2024, 7pm  
Frome Town Hall and Zoom

**Present:**

In the Town Hall: Tracey Ashford, Anita Collier, Fiona Barrows, Mark Dorrington, Anne Hills, Polly Lamb, Lisa Merryweather, Ben Still, Steve Tanner (Chair), Mel Usher, Max Wide

**On Zoom:**

Carla Collette

**In attendance:**

David Wilde (IT Consultant), Dawn Denton (SC Cllr), Martin Dimery (SC Cllr), Adam Boyden (SC Cllr), Mick Dunk (SC Cllr, online), Paul Wynne (Town Clerk), Sarah Williams (Business Manager), Peter Wheelhouse (Deputy Town Clerk), Rachel Griffin (Marketing and Communications Manager), Rob Holden (Environment Manager), Lucy McMahon (Lead Marketing and Communications Officer), Nikki Cox (Partnership Lead), Becca Evans (Business Administrator)

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

8 members of the public were in attendance on Zoom.

To watch to the discussion in full visit: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzUtWGgu2qA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzUtWGgu2qA)

Minute Ref	Agenda Item	Action
2024/01/FC	<p>The meeting started at 7pm.</p> <p><b>Elect an interim Chair</b></p> <p>Lisa Merryweather proposed Steve Tanner as interim Chair, seconded by Anne Hills, agreed unanimously.</p>	
2024/02/FC	<p>Steve noted the update on the School Streets programme at agenda 5 had been postponed.</p> <p><b>1a. Apologies for absence</b> Fiona Barrows proposed to accept apologies from Sara Butler, Philip Campagna and Andy Jones and from Carla Collette who attend on Zoom, seconded by Ben Still, agreed unanimously.</p> <p><b>1b. Declaration of members' interests</b> None was received.</p> <p><b>1c. Minutes from the last meeting on 6 December 2023</b> Paul Wynne read out some amendments from Andy Jones. His name was added to the attendee list. On page 5 he asked for</p>	

	<p>clarification on his wording around the Frome Independent, it was amended to “He also felt FTC could help support two organisations that had a positive impact on Frome and the Frome Independent may need FTC support as they had become a CIC.”</p> <p>The minutes of the Frome Town Council meeting held on 6 December 2023 were approved as a true record of the meeting and signed by the Chair.</p> <p>Proposed by Anne Hills, seconded by Anita Collier, agreed by majority. Mark Dorrington abstained.</p>	
<p>2024/02/FC</p>	<p>2. <u>Questions from public and Cllrs, including Somerset Cllrs</u></p> <p>None was received.</p>	
<p>2024/03/FC</p>	<p>3. <u>For decision - Work programme, budget and precept demand for 2024/25</u></p> <p>Lisa Merryweather introduced the report. Lisa set out FTC’s response to the Somerset Council (SC) financial emergency. She expressed sympathy for colleagues at SC, saying it wasn’t the moment to assign blame, but rather to work together to respond to challenges, and minimise the impact on Frome residents. She acknowledged that many people were already in financial difficulty and that the decision to increase the local precept (the element of council tax paid to the town council) was not taken lightly.</p> <p>Paul Wynne then presented the work programme for 2024/25.</p> <p>Max Wide then gave a presentation outlining the financial crisis at SC and why FTC were proposing a £350k devolution budget in order to protect assets and services in Frome.</p> <p>There was a discussion about the difficult decision to put up the precept and the risks of doing nothing and losing services and assets.</p> <p>Sarah Williams presented the proposed budget for 2024/25.</p> <p>Fiona Barrows expressed her concerns around the process of reaching the recommendations that were representative of the residents of the town. She also expressed her concerns about the impact of the increase in costs to residents that were coming from SC and the police as well of from the cost of living. Both Nick Dove and Lisa Merryweather explained the reasons for the proposals and how they stood by them.</p>	

	<p>Cllrs Adam Boyden and Martin Dimery also spoke about the difficulties being faced by Somerset Council C and FTC. A member of the public, Rich Ackroyd, urged FTC to accept the recommendations so that services weren't lost.</p> <p>The recommendations were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <a href="#">Approve the work programme for 2024/25 at Appendix 3.1</a></li> <li>2. <a href="#">Approve the proposed staff structure for 2024/25 at Appendix 3.2</a></li> <li>3. <a href="#">Approve the budget for 2024/25 at Appendix 3.3</a></li> <li>4. Approve the forecast General Reserve of £276k at 1 April 2024</li> <li>5. <a href="#">Approve the forecast Earmarked Reserves at 1 April 2024 at Appendix 3.4</a></li> <li>6. Approve the precept demand of £2,553,158 for 2024/25</li> </ol> <p>Proposed by Nick Dove, seconded by Anita Collier, agreed by majority. Fiona Barrows was against.</p> <p>The Chair called for a short break 8.17pm</p>	
<p>2024/04/FC</p>	<p>4. For decision - The process for producing the next FTC strategy for 2024-2027</p> <p>The meeting resumed at 8.23pm</p> <p>Carla Collenette, who attended the meeting online, asked to have it minuted that she would have voted in favour of agenda item 3 if she had been able to do so.</p> <p>Lisa Merryweather presented a summary of the report.</p> <p>Max Wide raised concerns over the proposal and thought it was too complicated. He also felt it was a huge amount of work particularly for staff. Max said the key was to engage with the people who were going to do the work. He didn't feel that the community were sufficiently engaged with.</p> <p>Mel Usher also felt it was over complicated and FTC needed to be more straightforward and build a learning organisation. He felt patterns should be identified that could be reacted to. It was about being adaptive to change. Mel said some of the best things FTC had done were never in a strategic plan like the response to the pandemic and the protection of Badgers Hill.</p> <p>Lisa noted that there were different approaches amongst the Cllrs to strategy. The recommendation was about things that</p>	

	<p>can be done to engage with community, be responsive to feedback, being agile, being able to change course, listening and making informed, well researched decisions. The approach was about finding a way to have a connection with the community.</p> <p>There was a discussion around community engagement and inclusivity. There was a general sense that Cllrs were not in agreement with the proposal. Paul Wynne felt Cllrs were being too hard on themselves and that as a council FTC's community engagement was really good.</p> <p>The recommendations were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Approve the process and timetable described in <a href="#">Appendix 4.1</a> to produce the next FTC strategy with a view to tabling it for approval in the late summer 2024.</li> </ol> <p>Lisa Merryweather retracted the recommendation</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Delegate to the Community Engagement Lead to commission a short-term research project to build a robust data picture. The project will run alongside of and be informed by the qualitative engagement process (and vice versa). This project to be funded by the Vision 4 Frome EMR for as an update to this piece of work.</li> </ol> <p>Lisa Merryweather retracted the recommendation</p> <p>Fiona Barrows proposed a meeting to be called for Cllrs to agree a revised strategy process and come back to the Council meeting in March, seconded by Mark Dorrington, agreed unanimously.</p>	PWy
2024/05/FC	<p>Agenda item 5 – School Streets</p> <p>The planned update on the School Streets project was postponed. There was some work relating to the contract and build programme that needed to be completed before a comprehensive briefing could be provided. A report would come to a future Council meeting.</p>	PWh
2024/06/FC	<p>6. For decision – IT systems upgrade</p> <p>Sarah Williams provided a summary of the report.</p> <p>Max Wide was pleased by the report and was excited about the possibilities of opening up of engagement.</p>	

	<p>Mel Usher noted there was no mention of Cllrs and suggested this be considered to allow them to use IT better. David Wilde confirmed that Cllrs had been considered in the report in the same way staff were.</p> <p>Fiona Barrows was apprehensive to agree to the recommendation due to the mention of Xplore Local. Sarah Williams confirmed that Cllrs were not being asked to approve any partnerships at this time. Collaborations would be considered at the appropriate time with stakeholders and Cllrs.</p> <p>Ben Still agreed digital infrastructure was key.</p> <p>The recommendation was to approve the IT upgrade work recommended in the report from David Wilde IT consultant using funding as required from the Database and Discover Frome EMR's as appropriate.</p> <p>Proposed by Fiona Barrows, seconded by Polly Lamb, agreed unanimously.</p>	<p>SW</p>
<p>2024/07/FC</p>	<p>7. For decision – calendar of meetings 2024/25 starting May 2024 Cllrs noted the report.</p> <p>The recommendation was to approve the calendar of meetings for 2024/25.</p> <p>Proposed by Fiona Barrows, seconded by Nick Dove, agreed unanimously.</p>	
<p>2024/08/FC</p>	<p>The next meeting will be at 7pm on Wednesday 21 February 2024, Frome Town Hall and Zoom</p>	

The chair closed the meeting at: 9.11pm