

Minutes of a meeting of Frome Town Council

Wednesday 18 February 2026, 7pm  
Frome Town Hall and Zoom

**Present:**

In the Town Hall: Tracey Ashford, Sara Butler (Chair), Philip Campagna, Carla Collenette, Anita Collier, Mark Dorrington, Nick Dove, Anne Hills, Andy Jones, Polly Lamb, Lyndsey Mayhew, Lisa Merryweather, Richard Pinnock, Ben Still, Steve Tanner

On Zoom: Tracey Ashford and Fiona Barrows

**In attendance:**

Cllr Martin Dimery (SC Cllr), Cllr Helen Kay (SC Cllr, online), Cllr Adam Boyden (SC Cllr, online), Anna Sabine, MP, Peter Wheelhouse (Acting Town Clerk), Jane Llewellyn (Acting Deputy Town Clerk), Sarah Williams (Business Manager & RFO), Rachel Griffin (Marketing and Communications Manager), Rob Holden (Environment Manager), Hannah Stopford (Community and Partnerships Development Manager), Lucy McMahon (Lead Marketing and Communications Officer, online), Laura Flaherty (HR Lead and Executive Assistant to the Town Clerk)

7 members of the public were in attendance at Frome Town Hall  
4 members of the public were in attendance on Zoom.

Minute Ref	Agenda Item	Action
2026/10/FC	<p>The meeting started at 7pm.</p> <p>1. To waive standing orders to enable a Cllr other than the Chair or Deputy Chair to chair this meeting</p> <p>Fiona Barrows apologised for being unable to attend in person and welcomed newly elected Richard Pinnock to his first meeting, congratulating him. Fiona then shared the personal news of her recent diagnosis of breast cancer and explained that she would shortly begin six months of chemotherapy and immunotherapy.</p> <p>She expressed determination to continue in her role while acknowledging that treatment effects remained uncertain. She explained her consultant had advised her not to attend in person meetings due to infection risk.</p> <p>Fiona asked councillors to agree a waiver of standing orders so that another Cllr could chair meetings during her treatment period. She also expressed her gratitude to Cllrs and staff for their practical and emotional support and made a personal plea for residents to support We Hear You, a local cancer counselling charity facing urgent financial pressure.</p>	

	<p>To allow a Cllr other than the Chair or Deputy Chair to preside, Andy Jones proposed the waiver of standing orders, seconded by Nick Dove, agreed by majority.</p>	
2026/11/FC	<p><b>Election of chair</b>                  Nick Dove proposed Sara Butler as Chair of the meeting, seconded by Philip Campagna, agreed by majority. Sara then assumed the chair.</p> <p>Andy Jones asked whether the arrangement could apply for multiple meetings, Peter Wheelhouse clarified that the vote must be repeated each time Fiona would be absent.</p>	
2026/12/FC	<p><b>3a. Apologies for absence</b>                  Lyndsey Mayhew proposed to accept apologies from Tracey Ashford and Fiona Barrows, seconded by Ben Still, agreed unanimously.</p> <p><b>2b. Declaration of members' interests</b>                  None was received.</p> <p><b>3c. Approval of minutes from the last meetings on 14 January 2026</b>                  The minutes of the Council meeting held on 14 January 2025 were approved as a true record of the meeting and signed by the Chair.</p> <p>Proposed by Carla Collenette, seconded by Anne Hills, agreed unanimously.</p>	
2026/13/FC	<p><b>4. Questions from public and Cllrs</b>                  Lenka Grimes raised concerns about ongoing misuse of the Changing Places toilet, particularly the unit near the Cheese &amp; Grain. She asked when a keypad could be installed to improve security. Rachel Griffin and Alastair Findlay explained that engagement work on all toilet facilities was about to begin, and that technical discussions with Bath &amp; NE Somerset (who use keypad systems) were underway. A six week consultation was planned. Andy Jones urged faster action, arguing the keypad need not wait for wider engagement given the seriousness of misuse. Officers agreed to explore accelerated options and keep Lenka updated.</p> <p>Chris Wildridge queried minute wording concerning the decision to defer the budget in the pre-election period. He argued Somerset Council had said the budget <i>could</i> be deferred rather than <i>must</i> and asked why FTC had chosen to do so.</p>	

	<p>Peter Wheelhouse explained that the Local Government Act 1986 prohibited publication of material that could influence an election. A by election in the Park Ward was set for 10 February. Draft budgets and work programmes could reasonably be seen as politically sensitive. FTC therefore used its discretion to defer publication, aligning with national guidance and good practice. Chris maintained that this had not been clear in previous meetings, but thanked Peter for the explanation.</p> <p>Anne Hills raised concerns that Fiona was unable to vote remotely under current legislation and described this as discriminatory for those undergoing medical treatment. She asked that the issue be taken to SALC and NALC. Fiona supported this and noted the emotional difficulty of being unable to vote on work she had helped shape. Andy Jones, FTC’s SALC representative, agreed to take the issue forward.</p>	
<p>2026/14/FC</p>	<p>5. For decision – Finance report to 31 January 2026 Sarah Williams gave a summary of the report.</p> <p>She noted FTC currently expected a £159,000 surplus carry forward, planned as income subsidy for next year’s budget. Auditor reports had identified several technical matters now addressed.</p> <p>Andy Jones commended Sarah and her team for all their work and asked about the EMR (s106) for Adderwell; Sarah clarified the year end adjustment would reduce the figure to approximately £3,000.</p> <p>The recommendations were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Approve Appendix 5.1 the Income &amp; Expenditure report at <del>18 November 2025</del> <b>31 January 2026</b></li> <li>2. Approve Appendix 5.2 the Balance Sheet including Earmarked Reserves at <del>18 November</del> <b>31 January 2026</b></li> <li>3. Approve Appendix 5.3 General Ledger - payments over £500 (Payments over £100 are published on the Finance page of Frome Town Council’s website here: <a href="https://www.frometowncouncil.gov.uk/council/frome-town-council/finance">https://www.frometowncouncil.gov.uk/council/frome-town-council/finance</a>)</li> <li>4. Note the External Auditor PKF Littlejohn’s Report dated 29 September 2025 at Appendix 5.4</li> <li>5. Note the Internal Auditor IAC Audit &amp; Consultancy Ltd.’s Kevin Rose report of 18 December 2025, summary, observations and recommendations including FTC’s comments at Appendix 5.5</li> </ol>	

	<p>Sarah highlighted an error in the dates listed in the original report recommendations in recommendations 1 and 2. Andy Jones proposed to accept the amendments, seconded by Lyndsey Mayhew, agreed unanimously.</p> <p>Proposed by Anne Hills, seconded by Carla Collenette, agreed unanimously.</p>	
<p>2026/15/FC</p>	<p><b>6. For decision - Work programme, budget, and precept demand for 2026/27</b></p> <p>Fiona Barrows introduced the Work Programme, Budget and Precept proposals. She outlined the strategic journey behind the programme, grounded in the Council’s updated strategy adopted in October. Priorities include support for young people, protection of the River Frome, maintenance of open spaces, improvement of public transport, and ensuring infrastructure keeps pace with development.</p> <p>She highlighted increased pressures from Somerset Council’s financial difficulties, which had led FTC to step up in multiple areas including asset transfers, town centre maintenance and support for vulnerable residents. Fiona reflected personally on the affordability of council tax increases, emphasising the Council’s careful line by line scrutiny of expenditure, the need for realistic budgeting, and the importance of healthy reserves given Somerset Council’s ongoing uncertainty.</p> <p>Managers each presented the major elements of their 2026/27 work:</p> <p>Community Engagement highlights included revitalisation of the Key Centre, participatory grant making, youth led commissioning, outreach into neighbourhoods, engagement on devolved open spaces, My Frome platform, and support for displaced people.</p> <p>Facilities highlights included statutory compliance, planned maintenance, and reactive repairs.</p> <p>Climate Action highlights included community climate engagement, continuation of the solar installation programme, home energy advice/retrofit (50 home target), and exploration of Warm Homes funding.</p> <p>Planning &amp; Development highlights included responding to approximately 185 applications annually, focusing on sustainable development, proactively working with developers, engaging with the Somerset Local Plan, creating a movement strategy and lobbying for a Community Infrastructure Levy.</p>	

	<p>Town Centre &amp; Economy highlights included a Frome Town Prospectus, public realm maintenance, recycling, business waste improvements, markets and events, Discover Frome marketing, CCTV and toilets.</p> <p>Open Spaces highlights included maintenance of increased estate size (50%), bin contract review due to Somerset Council cost rise, major play area improvements, depot repairs, cost-efficiency measures including red diesel and contract savings.</p> <p>Marketing &amp; Communications highlights included targeted communications, website redesign, launch of My Frome, increased staff hours and event support.</p> <p>Business Services highlights included continued finance, HR, governance, IT modernisation, cybersecurity as well as the creation of a medium-term financial plan.</p> <p>Richard Pinnock enquired about weed control in Park Ward. Rob Holden clarified that was a Somerset Highways' responsibility. Cllr Dimery did highlight the work of Frome Hoedown who organised volunteer weeding sessions around different parts of the town.</p> <p>Nick Dove expressed strong concern about the number of private collection contractors and commercial bins cluttering the town centre. He urged FTC to consider leading a coordinated daily collection system similar to Bath's. Fiona emphasised caution about expanding responsibilities too quickly while supporting the direction of travel, especially as FTC was already trialling new bin emptying contracts in open spaces.</p> <p>Lisa Merryweather delivered a substantial contribution urging more ambitious approaches to economic productivity, high value job creation, and post 16 education, noting structural deprivation in several wards. Fiona, Peter, Jane and Steve responded, outlining planned work on the Frome Prospectus, employment land protection, inward investment, skills development through s106, and cross sector partnerships on education.</p> <p>Lenka Grimes highlighted the pressures on Fair Frome and low income residents and was pleased FTCs proposed precept increase was relatively low. Sarah Williams clarified that 89% of households would pay an average increase of 32p/week under the proposed precept. Fiona stressed value for money and the need to maintain services residents rely on.</p> <p>Peter outlined recent staffing changes, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appointment of the new Facilities Manager,</li> </ul>	
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vacancy of the Town Clerk role (recruitment underway),</li> <li>• Rationalisation of the Communities Team,</li> <li>• Promotion of Laura Flaherty to HR Lead and appointment of a Business/HR Administrator,</li> <li>• Proposed additional hours for the Town Centre Coordinator and Marketing Assistant and a six month extension to the contract of the Home Energy Coordinator.</li> </ul> <p>Sarah Williams presented the proposed 26/27 budget. She noted that the salary budget was only 2% higher than the previous year, representing 50% of total expenditure. Overall expenditure was £36k lower than last year due to reduced use of reserves. In order to balance the budget, £159k general reserves and £161k earmarked reserves had been used.</p> <p>Sarah explained Frome’s Band D rate was rising to £315 for 26/27, which was lower than Bridgwater, Yeovil, Wells and Taunton. 76% of Frome households were Band A–C meaning 89% would see an average rise of 32p per week.</p> <p>Peter Wheelhouse noted that there had been a duplication of one recommendation therefore recommendation 3 was removed.</p> <p>The recommendations were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Approve the increase in staff hours for the Town Centre Co-ordinator</li> <li>2. Approve the increase in staff hours for the Marketing Assistant</li> <li><del>3. Approve the management team in the staff organisation chart</del></li> <li>4. Agree to waive the financial regulations to enter into a new contract with Will Reynolds for the renewables work for a further six months following the end of the Lotto funded Green &amp; Healthy Frome project at a cost of £8.5k</li> <li>5. Agree to offer a further six months fixed term contract to the existing Home Energy Retrofit Support Coordinator to carry on the work of Lotto funded Green &amp; Healthy Frome for a further six months at a gross cost of £13.5k</li> </ol> <p>Proposed by Anne Hills, seconded by Mark Dorrington, agreed by majority. Lisa Merryweather voted against.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. <a href="#">Approve the work programme for 2026/27 at Appendix 6.1</a></li> <li>7. <a href="#">Approve the proposed management structure for 2026/27 at Appendix 6.2</a></li> </ol> <p>Proposed by Steve Tanner, seconded by Anita Collier, agreed by majority. Nick Dove, Lisa Merryweather and Richard Pinnock were against.</p>	
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<p>2026/16/FC</p>	<p><b>7. For decision – Draft Improvement Plan</b></p> <p>Fiona Barrows and Peter Wheelhouse presented the Improvement &amp; Transformation Plan, arising from the LGA peer review undertaken in July. Fiona described the review as a constructive and challenging process, with the LGA recognising FTC’s innovative, community centric approach but identifying the need for strengthened governance, systems, risk management, and leadership capacity.</p> <p>Peter summarised improvements already underway (new HR structure, new payment controls, contracted payroll and Cllr training) and outlined next steps across four themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HR, governance, Cllr development – updated policies, scheme of delegation, annual staff meeting, induction programme, training needs analysis.</li> <li>• Finance &amp; risk – updated Risk Management Plan (next meeting), medium term financial plan, continued capacity monitoring.</li> <li>• Operational performance – golden thread linking Council Plan, work programme and staff objectives; IT tools; refreshed project management approach.</li> <li>• External partnerships – deeper collaboration with Somerset Council, aligned communications, use of sector networks.</li> </ul> <p>The recommendation was to delegate authority to the Acting Town Clerk to implement the proposed Improvement Plan set out in Paragraph 7 of this report.</p>	

	Proposed by Nick Dove, seconded by Polly Lamb, agreed by majority. Lisa Merryweather abstained.	
2026/17/FC	The next meeting will be at 7pm on Wednesday 25 March 2026, Frome Town Hall and Zoom	

The chair closed the public meeting at: 9.11pm

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