

Draft Minutes of the Frome Annual Town Meeting
Wednesday 2 April 2025, 7pm
Frome Town Hall and Zoom

In the Chair: Andy Jones, Mayor of Frome 2024/25

In attendance: Approx. 30 members of the public at the Town Hall

To watch the meeting in full visit: www.youtube.com/watch?v=6BP72keoi8U

1. Welcome from the Mayor of Frome

The meeting began at 7pm and Andy Jones welcomed all attendees.

2. Minutes of the last meeting on 3 April 2024

Minutes of the meeting held on 3 April 2024 were signed by the Chair as a true record of the meeting.

3. Presentation from Cllr Andy Jones on his year as Mayor

Andy began his presentation by explaining how he had asked his fellow Cllrs to elect him as Mayor as he was so keen to find out what made the wonderful town of Frome tick and to meet the amazing people who made it all work.

Some of Andy's key highlights from his year were the variety of events he attended and showcased the diverse and rich community life in Frome, demonstrating the town's strong sense of community and local engagement.

4. Questions and comments from the public and Cllrs

Bill Revans, Leader of Somerset Council, joined the meeting online. Bill said that the sale of the Saxonvale site had not progressed as quickly as they had hoped. Bill reassured that work continued towards the sale and that both parties were keen to complete the process soon.

Bill invited any questions from Cllrs or members of the public. Richard Thomas asked Bill his thoughts on the benefits of the new unitary Somerset Council. Bill then highlighted the benefits of the unitary system, such as better integration of services like housing and social care. He acknowledged the financial pressures on Somerset Council and the need for cooperation with local councils like Frome Town Council. Andy Jones and Mel Usher highlighted the improved working relationship with Somerset Council and the challenges of managing the financial situation of Somerset Council.

Lenka thanked Andy Jones for his support and raised concerns about the impact of upcoming rising energy bills on the community.

Anita Collier thanked the police and Somerset Council for addressing traffic issues outside the Pepper Box Nursery so soon after she raised her concern at the Council meeting in March.

Richard Thomas asked detailed questions about the town council's tax increase, staff costs, and the Town Hall's major works. The questions and answers have been appended to these minutes at page 4.

5. Lightning talks – What's your big idea for Frome

Graham Gillions from Keyford Hedgehog Rescue presented his light bulb moment about making Frome hedgehog friendly. He shared facts about hedgehogs, their population decline, and the importance of a healthy hedgehog population as an indicator of a good environment.

Graham suggested various ways to make Frome more hedgehog friendly, such as putting up signs, providing hedgehog houses, and ensuring fences had holes. He mentioned the Victoria Park Management Plan and the need for an explicit section for hedgehogs.

6. A video compilation of FTC Grant recipients in 2024/25

The Marketing and Communications team created a video to highlight all the groups and events that happened in Frome with the help of FTC grants. The video can be seen here on our YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJ22HOkSHOU

7. Presentation of the Mayor's Civic Awards

The Mayor's Civic Awards celebrate those in the community who had gone above and beyond.

Andy Jones presented awards to Ian Regler, Sharon Payne, and Stephen Caffyn for their efforts and generosity in resurfacing the pot hole ridden Frome Community Hospital car park.

Darren Bowsher was recognised for his generous donations to local organisations and his mentorship of local business owners. This included donating solar equipment, medical equipment and securing £20k of funding for the Community Fridge.

Karen Stewart was honoured for her tireless work with Fair Frome and the community radio station, Frome FM. Karen was not at the meeting and Andy presented her award in person at the next Council meeting in April.

Marjorie Morris was awarded for her 26 years of service with Art for Wellbeing, formerly SODA. Marjorie had helped artists with various disabilities to develop their art.

Richard Lines was recognised for his contributions to the Memorial Theatre and the Rotary Club of Frome.

Tim Fielding was honoured for his long-standing service as a security guard in Frome, and his support for the neighbourhood policing team. Andy praised Tim for his extensive local knowledge, willingness to help whenever needed and how he showed respect to everyone.

All award recipients received a certificate and flowers.

Andy thanked everyone for attending and invited everyone to stay for refreshments.

Meeting closed: 7.59pm

Cllrs and staff From Frome Town Council in attendance:

Frome Town Councillors: Sara Butler, Philip Campagna, Anita Collier, Nick Dove, Anne Hills, Andy Jones, Steve Tanner, Mel Usher

Frome Town Council Officers: Paul Wynne (Town Clerk), Rachel Griffin (Marketing and Communications Manager), Lucy McMahon (Lead Marketing and Communications Officer), Laura Flaherty (Executive Assistant to the Town Clerk and Mayor)

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Questions from Richard Thomas and FTC responses.

Questions sent ahead of the meeting and read out at the meeting by Andy Jones:

1. The Frome Town Council tax, for a band E property, rose by 26.4% in 2024/25 compared to 2023/24. What were the driving forces for this level of increase?

The driving force was primarily Devolution – preparing for the cost of running the assets and services that Somerset Council were planning to transfer to Frome Town Council.

2. The Frome Town Council tax, for a band E property, is rising by a further 6.6%% in 2025/26. What is driving another above inflation increase?

The increase was related to ongoing increases in costs or running the Council following devolution.

3. Budgeted staff costs, across the Town Council, were set to rise significantly in 2024/25. Were these increases realised and what were the driving forces behind such increases?

Yes, the increases have been realised. Driving forces included the results of an independent job evaluation project which increased salaries across the organisation, plus new posts created in 23/24 that incurred full year costs in 24/25.

4. Across the whole Town Council, what is the budgeted staff cost increase for 2025/26 over the actual total for 2024/25 and what are the driving forces?

The budgeted increase for 25/26 is £262k which includes 3 new posts (Facilities Manager, HR Assistant, Ranger). Take away the 3 new posts and the increase is £142k, which is a 9% increase on the previous year. This covers the increase in Employer National Insurance rates and an estimated salary increase across the payscale of £1,500 pa per FTE.

5. Budgeted staff costs for the “To co-ordinate town action to mitigate and adapt to climate change” aim in 2025/26 are £118,999 against a total expenditure of £141,499. What can be realistically achieved with a non-staff budget of only £22,500?

The main push for this work is around providing advice to the community and to run campaigns to help adapt to climate change. Primarily, this involves coordinating and scaling up community, business, and third sector activity. This primarily takes time, hence the concentration of the budget on staff.

6. The 2025/26 budget for Town Hall major works stands at £100,000. What major works are being undertaken, is this a one year or a multi-year project and what is the expected completion date?

This is a multi-year project with a large upfront investment this year. We need to re-point with lime mortar a large part of the building to reduce serious water ingress and also to allow the building to breathe to reduce damp, and while the scaffolding is up we will carry out repairs to the guttering and facias. Once that is done, we plan to carry out a series of retro-fit works to make the building more energy efficient and this will come back to Council for decision later in the year. As with any older building, there will be ongoing year on year maintenance costs.

Questions at the meeting and answered post meeting

1. As the major works to the Town Hall is a multi-year project, what will be the costs going forward beyond the 2025/26 financial year?

The works described in more detail in a report to Council in September 2024:

<https://www.frometowncouncil.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Summons-and-Agenda-Oversight-Committee-23-October-24.pdf>

Costs from 2026/27 start with the retro-fit assessment mentioned below. This will result in proposals to Council for future works, the detail of which is not yet known.

2. As part of the works is retrofitting for energy efficiency, what are the expected annual energy cost savings once the project has been completed?

Retro fit assessment – the next stage is to do a detailed project plan. This will include costing, scheduling and timings. This plan will return to Council for a decision whether to proceed.

3. How long will it take to complete the major works and what is the expected completion date?

We haven't put out this work to tender yet so start date/finish date is not established. The works are expected to take 16 weeks. We will communicate with residents as we know more.