

Agenda item 6

For decision - Work programme, budget, and precept demand for 2026/27

Authors: Peter Wheelhouse, Acting Town Clerk and the FTC Management Team

1. Summary and recommendations

This report builds on the Council Plan 2025-27 and is in three parts. First, it proposes the work programme for 2026/27; second, the proposed staff body; and third, the budget required to deliver the work programme along with the precept demand.

The proposed precept of £3,023,126 represents an increase of 39p a week for Frome on the current year for Band D properties, although 76% of Frome households will pay an average increase of 30p being in Bands A – C.

These documents in draft form have been discussed in detail with Cllrs.

It is recommended that Council approves these and with them, the annual precept for 2026/27 of £3,023,126.

Recommendations (see also end of report):

1. Approve the increase in staff hours for the Town Centre Co-ordinator
2. Approve the increase in staff hours for the Marketing Assistant
3. Approve the management team in the staff organisation chart
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 & Healthy Frome project at a cost of £8.5k
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 & Healthy Frome for a further six months at a gross cost of £13.5k
6. [Approve the work programme for 2026/27 at Appendix 6.1](#)
7. [Approve the proposed management structure for 2026/27 at Appendix 6.2](#)
8. [Approve the budget for 2026/27 at Appendix 6.3](#)
9. Approve the General Reserve to be £610k at 1/4/2026
10. [Approve the forecast Earmarked Reserves at 1 April 2026 at Appendix 6.4](#)
11. Approve the precept demand of £3,023,126 for 2026/27 to be submitted to Somerset Council on the next working day following this meeting.

2. Background

On 29 October 2025, councillors approved the Council Plan 2025-27. The Plan sets out a clear direction for the Council with aims around growing community wellbeing, supporting a thriving town, cultivating environmental sustainability, improving assets and infrastructure and improving the Council's operational efficiency and effectiveness. These aims firmly underpin the proposed work programme for 2026/27.

Whilst the emphasis is on consolidation following the earlier devolution of assets and services, there is a clear commitment to delivering tangible improvements in the town. These include:

- Working with the community to improve play areas, parks and open spaces – now 36 hectares in total
- Developing a thriving community space at the Key Centre
- Improving the impact and reach of grants for community organisations which in 2026/27 will total £95k
- Investing in Frome's future by developing an economic development strategy
- Stepping in to improve essential town centre infrastructure and help keep our town centre attractive for residents and visitors alike

3. The proposed Work Programme for 2026/27

See [Appendix 6.1, which can be viewed on the website here](#), for the summary spreadsheet.

3.1 Community engagement and development

This budget and work programme support the Council's priority to 'grow community wellbeing' by building strong, inclusive and resilient communities where people feel able to shape their neighbourhoods and influence local decisions. We focus on strengthening community capacity, widening participation and ensuring that support is targeted where it can have the greatest impact (see Aim 1 of the Council Plan).

Community spaces and local infrastructure build social capital and strengthen local networks and preventative support. We focus this year particularly on developing a thriving community space at the recently devolved Key Centre, building on early successes to increase occupancy and enable more residents and groups to access affordable, sustainable spaces for events, meetings and projects. Working in partnership, the offer is shaped with the local community and other stakeholders, creating a sense of ownership and increasing opportunities for effective signposting and preventative networks.

We continue a strong emphasis on enabling community-led action and supporting our vibrant Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise sector with training, networking opportunities, advice and practical resources. We will use the learning from some recently commissioned research to refine a strategic approach to partnership working. Effective collaboration on agreed priorities will enable proactive proposals to attract relevant and substantial external funding and deliver ambitious projects for the town.

A major area of investment is the Council's grants and funding programmes which includes the Fair Frome Grant and the wider Community Grants scheme. Pilots carried out in 25/26 will inform a more participatory approach to grant making, including the delivery of a grant co-designed with Young People and the inclusion of an advisory panel for the Community Grant rounds. This works towards funding that is distributed fairly, transparently and in ways that reach marginalised and underrepresented groups, maximising social value and long-term impact.

The voice of children and young people are brought to the fore in projects that will include the co-design of spaces, young people's forums, participatory grant making, engagement through events, exploration of post-16 offers and responsive commissioning of services. These initiatives strengthen young people's confidence, leadership and sense of belonging, supporting the Council's commitment to future generations and their ability to meaningfully input into the decisions that impact their lives.

The Communities Team endeavours to reach and involve those most marginalised or 'easily ignored'. Engagement Officers are eyes and ears on the ground for targeted work in neighbourhoods and with communities of identity or interest. A focus in this work programme will be on engagement around newly devolved spaces including green spaces and the Riverside vision. We will work with the Communications Team to use and promote the 'My Frome' digital engagement platform and utilise its function as a collation tool for the results of face-to-face engagement work, allowing more straightforward and comprehensive analysis across formats.

Our team will support the work of the Council's Improvement Working Group particularly around equality, diversity and inclusion. A development of an Equality Action Plan, including the use of equality impact assessment tools and stakeholder bursaries, will help remove barriers to participation and ensure that Council priorities and projects reflect the diversity of the town.

The Welcome Hub is fully funded by an external contract (until July 2027) with Thrive Somerset and the Welcome to All partnership. Our welcome hub advisor delivers essential support, both practical and wellbeing, to the growing community of displaced people who have settled in or near Frome and supports them to make stronger links into the community, which furthers our wider aim of ensuring marginalised groups are included and listened to.

Our partnership with Somerset Connect enables a fully funded (until March 2028) Champion to be our bridge here between statutory and non-statutory services, providing coordinated support for residents. This capacity to build strong partnerships strengthens early intervention, improves access to advice and reduces pressure on crisis services.

As with other programmes, the largest single investment here is in skilled staff. Community development managers, officers and children and young people specialists provide the expertise and continuity needed to build trusted relationships, support volunteers and deliver complex partnership work. This ensures that community engagement is consistent, responsive and rooted in local need.

Overall, the budget and work programme invest in people, participation and place. They enable the Council to work alongside residents, community groups and partners to build capacity, reduce inequality and support a town where everyone in Frome feels connected, valued and able to contribute.

3.2 Assets, facilities management & maintenance

This proposed work programme and budget support the Council's priority to protect, improve and make the best possible use of its buildings and public assets (Aim 4 within the Council Plan). This is to ensure that they remain safe, accessible, financially sustainable and fit for community use. The focus is on responsible stewardship, long-term maintenance and maximising social and economic value from the Council's estate.

A significant proportion of the budget is directed towards statutory compliance, facilities management and day-to-day running costs across key buildings, particularly the Key Centre and Town Hall. This includes fire, electrical and legionella safety, utilities, cleaning, waste removal and planned maintenance. Consolidating contracts across the estate will support efficiency, value for money and consistent standards of care.

Investment in major works and reserves reflects the Council's commitment to protecting its assets for the long term. Funding is set aside for the Town Hall building envelope repair, supported through earmarked reserves. This proactive approach reduces future risk, avoids costly emergency repairs and safeguards this important community building.

The budget also supports key strategic assets that contribute to Frome's social and cultural life. At Badgers Hill Stadium, contingency and legal budgets are proposed to support the work underway to find a suitable tenant for the site. At the Cheese & Grain which FTC leases from Somerset Council, funding covers loan repayments related to earlier investment, insurance and development contingencies (especially in relation to the Cheese & Grain's plans to extend the facility).

Income generation is an important part of the programme. Income from room hire fees, EV charging fees, tenant leases and solar panels will help offset our costs and improve financial sustainability. As part of work on a Medium-Term Financial Plan, the Council will review revenue generation within the Town Hall and Key Centre and consider how income can be maximised alongside generating community benefit.

Dedicated funding for Town Hall maintenance, utilities and renewable energy loan repayments will ensure that the building remains efficient, affordable to run and environmentally sustainable.

As with other programmes, a major element of spend is investment in skilled staff. Facilities Manager, stewards, cleaners and customer service advisers ensure buildings are welcoming, well managed and safe for all users. What we are aiming for is high-quality service delivery and a positive user experience.

Overall, this proposed work programme and budget invest in stewardship, sustainability and service quality. They will enable the Council to care for its assets responsibly, support community use, generate income and ensure that Frome's public buildings continue to serve residents now and in the future.

3.3 Climate Action

This proposed work programme and budget support the Council's commitment to tackling the climate emergency and to work with residents, businesses, community groups and other

partners and stakeholders to reduce carbon emissions and waste and adapt to the effects of climate change (Aim 3 in the Council Plan). The work programme focuses on practical action, community leadership and long-term systems change.

A core strand of the programme is coordination – the budget prioritises strong partnership working and participation through events and other channels. Resources will enable the Council to convene networks, support schools, host engagement events and help coordinate community groups. This collaborative approach will strengthen local innovation and ensure that climate action is shaped and delivered with the community.

The Council aims to be a trusted independent information source and to this end we are working to enhance our local data sources, analysis and communication. The aim is to ensure that there is access to clear, evidence-based information about climate risks and opportunities.

In the current financial year, the third and final year of the Green & Healthy Frome programme (GHF), underspent Lottery funding was reallocated to trial a new role - Renewable Energy Coordinator, delivered on a self-employed contract basis. This role looks across the town for new renewable energy opportunities for homes, businesses and community organisations. Primarily we are looking for new places to put solar panels although wind turbines are also becoming a possibility. This work has achieved good results. We have supported a new solar array for the Cheese and Grain and are running feasibility processes for schools via the Multi Academy Trust (MAT). Funding for the next round of a feasibility study into a wind turbine has been secured and we have communicated with many homes about the solar potential of their roofs with several proceeding with works.

This contract is due to come to an end at the end of March as Lottery funding comes to an end at that point. However, due to the success of this initiative to date and the potential for further success in the future, the proposal is to enter into a new contract with the current contract holder, Will Reynolds with FTC funding two days for a period of 6 months. Amongst other things, this would enable FTC to explore the potential for external funding of this service in the future whilst momentum on the project is sustained.

Ordinarily and as set out in our Financial Regulations (clause 14.5), this contract would have to be advertised and three quotations sought. However, the proposal is to waive Clause 14.5. Waiving the financial regulations would enable us to continue with the contractor already familiar with the work and who had tendered for the original project under the Lotto funded GHF programme. It would be disingenuous to go out to tender for the six-month contract when the best qualified contractor is already engaged in the work.

Improving energy efficiency in homes is another key priority again building on GHF. The budget is intended to support retrofit advice, assessments and other support for households, including those facing financial or other practical barriers. Work with neighbourhood ambassadors and local tradespeople will help residents to reduce energy use, cut bills and improve comfort, while contributing to carbon reduction targets. The proposed plan is to keep the existing Home Energy Retrofit Support Coordinator progressing this work for another six months while we are making good impact. Exciting new announcements indicate significant

new funding coming soon from central government and our aim is to be well positioned and ready to put in funding bids to ramp up this work.

The programme will also invest in materials, reuse and the circular economy. Through initiatives such as Keep It Frome, support for reuse and repair, and exploration of the potential for a reuse centre in the town, our work will encourage sustainable consumption and waste reduction. This will support both environmental and economic resilience by keeping resources in local circulation.

Overall, this work programme and budget will enable FTC to continue leading by example on climate response, empowering its community to reduce emissions, adapt to change and build a fairer, greener and more resilient future.

3.4 Planning and infrastructure

This proposed work programme and budget supports the Council's priority to shape high-quality, sustainable and inclusive development in and around Frome, ensuring that growth meets local needs and contributes positively to the town's long-term wellbeing. The focus is on strengthening local influence, improving infrastructure outcomes and giving residents a stronger voice in planning decisions.

A core element of the programme is providing expert planning advice and support to councillors on the Planning Committee, residents and developers. The role is also to negotiate improvements to schemes at the pre-application stage to ensure that new development reflects local priorities and delivers social, environmental and economic benefits. Investment in engagement and democratic participation is another key feature of the work programme. Resources are allocated to support consultation and the coordination of a Citizens' Assembly when appropriate. A further report will be brought to Council as soon as possible to set out how this would work before we proceed to implementation.

With the development of Somerset's Local Plan comes an opportunity to influence future planning policies. It is proposed that we gather local evidence and prepare supplementary planning documents, particularly in relation to major sites, transport and walking and cycling infrastructure to inform the Plan.

The programme also prioritises action on key local challenges, including road safety, public transport and the housing crisis. We will advocate for investment in safer streets, better connectivity in the town and affordable housing.

A further focus is securing and managing developer contributions. The budget supports work to publish and maintain an infrastructure priorities list and to ensure that Section 106 funding is secured and invested in agreed local projects. This will help ensure that development pays its fair share towards schools, transport, green spaces and community facilities.

Through partnership and advocacy, the programme is also about influencing projects such as river and transport links and lobbying for new funding mechanisms such as the Community Infrastructure Levy and governance reviews.

As with other programmes, the largest single investment is in skilled staff. The Planning & Development Manager and Planning & Development Officer provide the professional expertise and continuity needed to manage complex cases, build relationships and represent the town effectively.

3.5 Economic regeneration and town centre

This element of our proposed work programme and budget supports our priority to strengthen Frome's local economy and ensure a thriving, welcoming and resilient town centre (Aim 2 in the Council Plan). It focuses on creating the conditions for long-term economic health while delivering visible, practical improvements that benefit residents, businesses and visitors.

A key strand of investment is in shaping a clear and confident future for Frome. Funding for a 'Frome Town Prospectus' will define the town's identity and potential, setting out a compelling case for strategic investment and funding. This will be complemented by work with education and business partners to explore post-16 opportunities, helping local people to gain skills and supporting a strong local workforce.

Significant resource is directed to the everyday quality of the town centre. This includes maintenance of the public realm, improvements delivered by the Town Centre Ranger, work around securing new recycling bins and working with businesses to address commercial waste. These practical measures will support a clean, well-cared for and welcoming environment, reinforcing pride in place and making the town centre work better for everyone.

Frome is a market town, and markets and town activity remain central to Frome's identity. Proposed funding for weekly market management, a service that was devolved to FTC last year and for major events such as Christmas celebrations and the Lantern Parade will bring people into the town centre, support local traders and strengthen Frome's reputation as a lively and creative place.

The Discover Frome programme will continue to promote our town as a destination, with investment in the website, the Discover Frome Information point, its volunteers, and partnerships with local and regional event organisers, producers and venues. This will support sustainable tourism, encourage longer visits, increase footfall in the town and help people to explore the town, and spend locally.

The proposed budget will also provide for essential infrastructure that underpins a safe and functional town centre. This includes CCTV, the Loop building, Market Yard toilets, cleaning, utilities and compliance. Alongside this, investment in the staff team – including the Town Centre Ranger, Town Centre Coordinator and volunteer support will ensure that this work is delivered consistently and with care.

Taken together, this programme will invest in place, people and potential. It will balance the development of a long-term vision for Frome's economy with day-to-day action, enabling Frome to remain a distinctive, inclusive and economically resilient town where businesses can thrive and people want to spend time.

3.6 Open Spaces

This proposed work programme and budget supports the Council's priority to protect, enhance and sustainably manage Frome's parks, green spaces and natural environment, ensuring they remain safe, inclusive, welcoming and biodiverse places for recreation, wellbeing and community life (see Aim 3 within the Council Plan). The work is concerned with long-term stewardship, day-to-day maintenance and increasing access to high-quality outdoor spaces.

A significant proportion of the budget is directed towards the routine maintenance and management of open spaces. This includes grass cutting, planting, hedging, tree work, equipment maintenance, vehicle costs and fuel. These resources ensure that parks, play areas, verges and green corridors are well cared for, safe to use and visually attractive throughout the year.

Investment in infrastructure and facilities will support the continued use of key sites. Funding covers maintenance and utilities for buildings, Victoria Park bandstand and café, toilets, depots and sports facilities, as well as unplanned repairs. This will ensure that community buildings within parks remain accessible, compliant and fit for purpose.

It is proposed that funding is allocated to play and recreation to include new play equipment, reserves for future play area development and a contribution to a new skatepark at Mary Baily. These investments will support children and young people's physical health and social development.

The proposed work programme and budget also reflect the Council's commitment to nature recovery and a response to the ecological emergency. Resources will support the development and launch of a Nature Recovery Plan, community workshops, tree planting, wildflower planting and habitat creation. This work will enable the wider community to support Frome's aim of strengthening biodiversity, as well as improving landscape quality and supporting wider climate and environmental objectives.

Significant provision is made for waste, cleanliness and safety in public spaces. Funding for bins, litter collection, PPE, training and speed indicator devices will help keep parks and streets clean, safe and welcoming, while supporting staff wellbeing and regulatory compliance.

The programme will include investment in key sites such as Victoria Park, Adderwell Water Meadow and the Community Woodland. Funding will support maintenance, security, paths, boardwalks and landscape works, ensuring these valued spaces continue to meet community needs and are resilient to wear, weather and changing patterns of use. We will aim to refresh some of the existing FTC community sites such as Mary Baily (co-design and Skatepark projects), Victoria Park (tree and sculpture trails, toddler play area refresh) and Tower View (play area) and enhance some of the new local community spaces following community consultation, notably Brunel Way and the St Johns Play Area, but also Marley's Way and the Wellow Drive Wildlife area.

As with other service areas, the largest element of spend is investment in skilled staff. The Environment Manager, rangers, Tree Officer, and Resilience Officer provide

the expertise and capacity needed to manage complex sites, support volunteers and deliver high standards of care. This staffing resource underpins consistent, responsive and locally informed service delivery.

Overall, this proposed work programme and budget invest in green infrastructure, community wellbeing and environmental stewardship. They enable the Council to look after Frome's open spaces responsibly, support inclusive active lifestyles, enhance biodiversity and ensure that everyone can enjoy high-quality natural environments close to where they live.

3.7 Marketing and communication

This proposed work programme and budget support our ambition to inform, involve and empower people in Frome, ensuring residents can see, understand and take part in the work of FTC. This reflects our priority to build trust, increase participation and strengthen Frome as a connected, confident and resilient town (fits with Aim 5 of the Council Plan which is concerned with developing a bold and effective Council).

The largest element of spend is investment in the marketing, communications and events team. Our skilled staff team enable the Council to be responsive, consistent and accessible, and this team supports every area of the work programme to ensure that residents receive timely, accurate and inclusive information.

Investment in digital infrastructure underpins our commitment to open, transparent and participatory democracy. Funding for the FTC website, its redesign and the new My Frome engagement platform will make it easier for people to find information, understand what the Council does and have their say on decisions that affect their lives. This directly supports our aim to widen participation and remove barriers to involvement.

Targeted budgets for newsletters, social media, printed materials and accessible content, including film, ensure that the information flowing out of the Council reaches people in ways that suit them. This helps us reach beyond the usual voices and engage a broader cross-section of the community.

Spending on events and town activity will support our priority to create welcoming, inclusive spaces and places where people can come together. Funding will enable the delivery of town events, community meetings and activity in parks, open spaces and key town centre locations. It will ensure that events are safe, well stewarded and aligned with our strategic objectives.

Taken together, these proposed activities will invest in people, platforms and presence. They will enable the Council to communicate clearly, engage widely and support a vibrant, participatory town where everyone can feel informed, involved and valued.

3.8 Business Services

The business services team deliver finance, IT, legal, governance, HR and civic services across the Council. The 2026/27 work plan and budget provides the strong foundations needed to

deliver services and projects for the community and town. It focuses on sound financial management, efficient systems, staff development and robust governance.

Funding supports development of the Medium-Term Financial Plan to ensure the Council can plan ahead, improve risk management and long-term financial stability in a changing economic environment.

Resources include support for external and internal audits, VAT compliance, HR consultancy and risk management processes. These measures strengthen transparency, accountability and public confidence in how the Council manages public money.

Investment in digital systems and infrastructure underpins efficient working and accessible spaces and meetings. Costs include IT software support, hardware replacement, audiovisual maintenance, financial and HR software, cloud services and cybersecurity. This ensures that staff have reliable, secure tools to work effectively and that Council data is protected.

The budget also provides for workforce development and organisational resilience. Resources are allocated to staff training, leadership development, project management skills, wellbeing initiatives and the development of a staff welfare programme. This supports recruitment, retention and succession planning, helping to build a motivated and capable workforce.

Legal fees, professional subscriptions, insurance and recruitment costs enable the Council to access expert support, further manage risk and meet statutory and regulatory responsibilities.

Everyday business operations costs include telecommunications (VOIP lines, mobiles and internet), stationery, printing, bank charges and office systems, essential services for the efficient day-to-day functioning of a Council.

The programme also includes democratic and civic functions, including savings towards future elections, civic services, twinning activities, mayoral grants and member allowances. This ensures that the Council's democratic role is properly resourced.

As with other service areas, the largest single investment is in skilled staff. The Town Clerk, Responsible Finance Officer (RFO), HR Lead, governance and administrative teams provide the professional expertise needed to manage complex systems, support colleagues and ensure compliance. This staffing capacity underpins organisational effectiveness and service delivery.

Overall, this work programme and budget invest in strong governance, capable staff and reliable systems. Together they enable the Council to operate efficiently, manage risk responsibly and provide a stable platform from which it can deliver its Strategic Plan.

3.9 Improvement & Transformation

FTC has grown considerably over the last few years and we want to ensure that our governance and systems reflect the increased scale, scope and complexity of our work. This proposed work programme and budget is not only a response to the Corporate Peer Challenge in July 2025 but also the needs of an organisation in transition. This work area brings together a range of activities informed by the Council's Improvement Advisory Group and set out in

more detail within the draft Improvement Plan which is also being considered at this Council meeting.

Overall this will support the Council's priority to be a learning, adaptable and high-performing organisation, able to respond effectively to changing community needs, financial pressures and regulatory requirements (see Aim 5 within the Council Plan).

A core element of the programme is investment in people and organisational culture. It will support staff and councillor development, annual facilitated meetings and briefings, improved internal communications and the development of a staff welfare package. This will help build a motivated, skilled and supported workforce and strengthen councillor/staff relationships.

Resources are directed towards improving governance, financial resilience and risk management. This work will include the development of a Medium-Term Financial Plan and strengthening the Risk Management Plan. There will be an emphasis on developing policies and improving awareness amongst staff and councillors that ensure that the Council can meet its duties in law including those set out in the Equality Act, Employment Rights Bill and other emerging legislation.

The work area also prioritises operational efficiency and modernisation. The programme of work will support reviews of staff structures and schemes of delegation, improvements to IT and digital capability and the development of guidance around emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI).

Improving performance, impact and project management is another key focus ensuring that progress against the Council's priorities is monitored, evaluated and continuously improved.

Investment in partnership working and collaboration will also feature. There will be a focus on exploring how we can work more collaboratively with Somerset Council and other local partners to benefit the local community.

Overall, this proposed work programme and budget will invest in capability, consistency and continuous improvement. They will provide the tools, skills and frameworks needed to support strong leadership, effective governance and high-quality services, ensuring that FTC remains resilient, responsive and focused on delivering for its community.

4. Staff structure

The staff structure shown in [Appendix 6.2, which can be viewed on the website here](#), shows that there have been some changes since last April.

As approved by Council in January 2025, the team has been strengthened with the creation of a Facilities Manager post currently occupied by Alastair Findlay. Paul Wynne retired from the Council in October 2025 leaving the Town Clerk post vacant. Since then, Peter Wheelhouse has stepped up as Acting Town Clerk and Jane Llewellyn has acted as his deputy. A process is currently underway to recruit a new Town Clerk as approved by councillors in January 2026.

There has been some rationalisation within the Communities Team following the departure of the former Partnerships Lead, Nikki Cox in December 2025. That vacancy has not been advertised. Rather, Hannah Stopford has now taken sole managerial responsibility for the Communities Team as Community Partnerships & Development Manager. This has resulted in a decrease in the number of staff working in the Communities Team.

The Peer Review Team and Improvement Advisory Group identified a gap in our HR and Business Support capacity. In response, Laura Flaherty was promoted to HR Lead & Executive Assistant to capitalise on her recent professional qualification and the post of Business & HR Administrator was created.

The following changes are proposed:

- To reflect the growing programme of work in the town centre as set out in Section 3.6 of this report, additional hours are proposed for the Town Centre Co-ordinator. Their role is increasingly focused on coordinating activity across a complex and evolving town centre environment, including economic regeneration, public realm improvements, engagement, and partnership working. This additional capacity will support more proactive management, improved collaboration with traders and partners, and the delivery of town centre initiatives that supports local businesses, residents and visitors.
- Additional hours are also proposed for the Marketing & Communications Assistant to reflect a sustained increase in workload. These additional hours will support the delivery of high-quality visual content across print and digital channels, and the effective administration and analysis of the new digital engagement platform, ensuring that communications capacity keeps pace with the Council's growing ambitions and commitments.
- As set out in Section 3.3 and to enable our work around retrofit to continue, it is proposed to extend the contract of our Home Energy Retrofit Support Coordinator by a further 6 months

The impact on the salary budget in 2026/27 of these changes will be £43k which is included in the proposed budget.

5. Proposed budget & precept for 2026/27

This part of the report explains the components of the expenditure budget and the income required to match it. This includes the proposed precept amount.

The proposed budget for 2026/27 can be found at [Appendix 6.3 which can be viewed on the website here.](#)

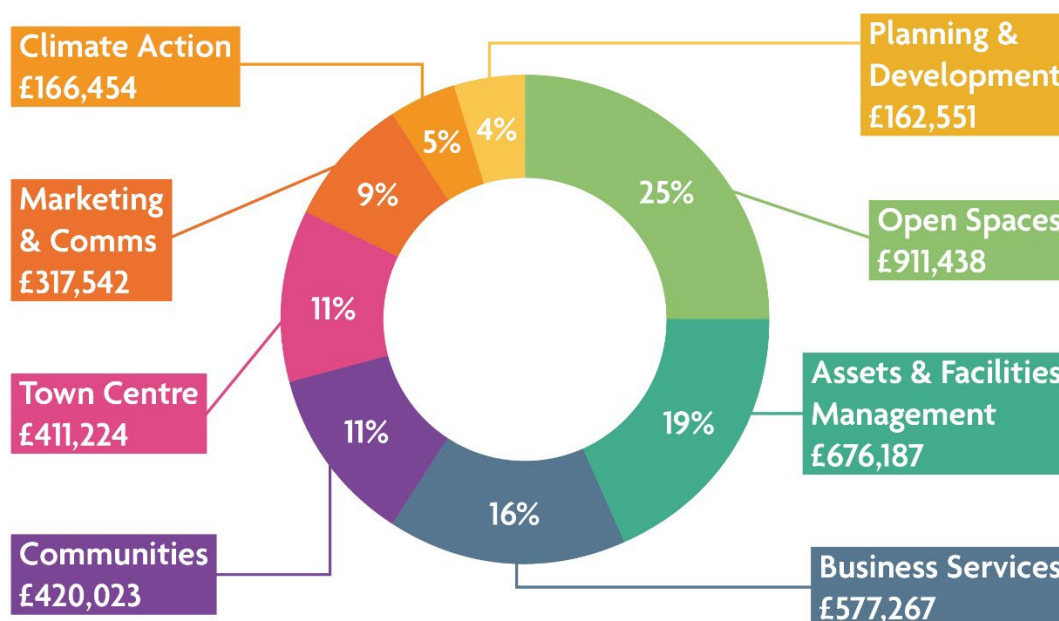
The first section below discusses the various parts of the expenditure budget. The second section discusses how it is proposed to match expenditure with income. The third section considers our General and Earmarked Reserves.

In finalising the 2026/27 budget and precept demand we have balanced delivering the extensive work programme with strengthening our prudent financial reserve as recommended in the Peer Review report.

5.1 Total budgeted expenditure for 2026/27

Each year, the budget planning starts with a clean sheet. Known or very firm costs are added (for example: utilities, insurance, subscriptions, H&S inspections) followed by costs required to deliver the work programme. These costs are shown in the right-hand columns of each area's work programme. The total expenditure required to deliver the Council's strategy in 2026/27 is £3,642,687 which is £35,856 less than 2025/26 which was £3,678,543.

The summarised budget for next year is in [Appendix 6.3, which can be viewed on the website here](#) and shown in the chart below.



5.2 Total budgeted income for 2026/27

Income for 2026/27 comes from three different sources

Total budgeted income during 2026/27 (2025/26 figures)	£3,642,687 (£3,678,543)
Of which:	
a. Precept (from Council taxpayers in Frome)	£3,023,126 (£2,777,932)
b. Income from room hire, rents, sales, and interests on savings	£204,703 (£188,440)
c. Income from grants (net of salary grants, salaries also excluded)*	£93,500 (£75,000)
d. General Reserve & Earmarked Reserves	£321,358 (£637,171)

5.2.a Income from the Precept

The precept is the amount we receive from Frome households via Council Tax bills issued by Somerset Council. It is usually discussed as the “Band D amount households in Frome will pay” for the Frome portion of their Council Tax bill. Banding is based on the (1991) value of a property; the range goes from Band A (lowest) to Band H (highest). In 2025/26 Frome Town Council’s portion of the annual council tax bill in a Band D property was £295.11.

To enable FTC to support the delivery of the proposed 2026/27 work programme, the proposed precept is **£3,023,126**, resulting in a Band D rate for Frome of £315.30 per annum - an increase of 6.84 per cent/£20.18 per annum. This equates to a weekly increase of 39 pence for Band D households, 13 per cent of Frome households, and 30 pence for 76 per cent of Frome households.

In addition, approximately 27 percent of the total 13,205 households in Frome pay a further reduced amount of Council Tax through single occupancy or student discounts and/or are receiving benefits.

The total weekly cost of the Frome section of the Council Tax bill is therefore an average of £4.72 for 76 per cent of Frome households.

Comparative towns Band D rates for 2026/27 are:

Bridgwater	£432
Yeovil	£370
Wells	£367
Taunton	£338
Frome	£315

5.2.b. Income from rents, sales, and interests on savings

Budgeted revenue income during 2026/27 (2025/26)	£201,263 (£188,440)
Of which:	
a. Investments* and Discover Frome sales	£61,800 (£84,800)
b. Room hire and rental income from Frome Town Hall	£66,063 (£56,540)
c. Lease income from Badgers Hill Football Stadium & Clubhouse	£32,000 (£8,000)
d. PV panels & Open Spaces works	£15,400 (£18,100)
e. Devolved assets/services (Key Centre estimated)	£26,000** (£29,000)

* Investment interest is budgeted a third less than actual 25/26 due to Somerset Council retaining 50% of the precept payment to September 2026 thereby reducing the interest the funds would have earned Frome Town Council by being held in the CCLA Public Sector Deposit Fund (PSDF) investment account.

** Devolved assets income is reduced as Frome markets have been contracted out to The Frome Independent (expenses have also consequently reduced).

5.2.c. Income from grants

Budgeted grant income during 2026/27 (2025/26)	£93,500 (£75,000)
Of which:	
f. THRIVE grant – for the Welcome Hub Officer & work for displaced people	£57,100 (£56,909)
g. Somerset Connect grant – supporting the Somerset Connect Area Champion post at FTC	£36,400 (£36,400)

5.2.d. Income from the General Reserve and Earmarked Reserves (EMRs)

General Reserves began the financial year at 1 April 2025 at £610k. The estimated underspend at 31 March 2026 is currently £159,818 which is largely due to projects being carried forward to next year. It is therefore proposed to use the full underspend of £159,818 to subsidise next year's revenue budget.

We are also proposing to support the 2026/27 work programme with £161k from Earmarked Reserves for established projects. The full proposed use of reserves is shown in the table below.

General Reserve & Earmarked Reserves (EMR) use in 2026/27 (2025/26)	£321,358 £637,171)
Of which:	
Forecast underspend from the General Reserve 2025/26	£159,818 (£94,503)
EMR 358 New Projects – Skate Park agreed funding 25/26	£21,000
EMR 390 Discover Frome – FTC website redevelopment	£16,540
EMR 400 Town Hall Investment	£124,000

5.3. Status of our reserves

The General Reserve is for unplanned and emergency expenditure. The Council's Financial Regulations currently say that the general reserve should be a minimum of £350k but given that the recommended reserve is three to six months operating costs, given its annual revenue expenditure Frome Town Council would now be expected to set its minimum prudent reserve at a higher limit. We will report further at March Council with a proposal to formally increase the prudent reserve.

General Reserves began the financial year at 1 April 2025 at £610k. Given the proposal above this would leave the General Reserve figure at 1/4/2026 starting next financial year at £610k. Whilst this is higher than the current figure stated in the financial regulations, it is closer to the recommended prudent reserve figure. We are proposing that we maintain this level of appropriately strong and prudent reserve.

Earmarked Reserves are amounts that have been established – sometimes over several years – to pay for specific projects. For example, we add to an Elections EMR annually to cover the costs of the next elections. EMRs are also created when budgeted work is postponed from one year to the next. The forecast list of EMRs (after proposals above) is at [Appendix 6.4 and can be viewed on the website here](#). It will be adjusted again at year end and presented to Council for approval at the May 2026 meeting.

6. Key considerations for the Council

- Enhance cash reserves as far as possible
- Ensure staff training and skills development supported in work programme

7. Engagement, feedback and next steps governance

Additional reporting clarified for some work programme items. They include:

Report	To
Learning from test and learn year of Key Centre (to inform management plan)	Council
Citizens Assembly brief (for decision)	Council
Movement Strategy brief (for decision)	Council
Market Yard toilets/Frome Riverside (for decision)	Council
See Improvement Plan report on this agenda for reporting to on various other items	Council & Operations & Assets Committee

8. Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan

The work programme and budget align firmly with the Council Plan 2025-27

9. Financial and Risk Implications

[See Section 5 of this report](#)

10. Legal / HR Implications

[See Section 4 of this report](#)

11. Equalities Implications

[See Section 3.1 of this report and draft Improvement Plan on this agenda](#)

12. Climate Change and Sustainability Implications

[See Section 3.3 of this report](#)

13. Health and Safety Implications

[See Section 3.2 of this report](#)

14. Background papers

Council Plan 2025-27 www.frometowncouncil.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Council-Plan-2025-27.pdf

15. Report Sign-Off

Peter Wheelhouse, Acting Town Clerk 11/02/26

Recommendations:

1. Approve the increase in staff hours for the Town Centre Co-ordinator
2. Approve the increase in staff hours for the Marketing Assistant
3. Approve the management team in the staff organisation chart
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 & Healthy Frome project at a cost of £8.5k
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 & Healthy Frome for a further six months at a gross cost of £13.5k
6. [Approve the work programme for 2026/27 at Appendix 6.1](#)
7. [Approve the proposed management structure for 2026/27 at Appendix 6.2](#)
8. [Approve the budget for 2026/27 at Appendix 6.3](#)
9. Approve the General Reserve to be £610k at 1/4/2026
10. [Approve the forecast Earmarked Reserves at 1 April 2026 at Appendix 6.4](#)
11. Approve the precept demand of £3,023,126 for 2026/27 to be submitted to Somerset Council on the next working day following this meeting.