

Agenda item 9

For decision – Changing contractor for managing waste from bins on the FTC estate from Somerset Council to Busy Bees

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Summary (incl. Recommendation)

This proposal concerns the bins on the FTC estate and not the bins in the public realm.

Until May 2025 the bins on FTC land had been managed by private contractor Idverde. When they ceased to operate in the Frome area a competitive tender for the contract was awarded to Somerset Council (SC). A 9-month service level agreement was set up running from June 2025 to March 2026. Under Idverde's management there had been concerns about lapses in service with occasions when bins remained unemptied for consecutive days. Over the last 9 months under SC these same concerns have remained.

For FY 26/27 SC have quoted a 59% increase in their contract cost.

This paper explores the option of an alternative supplier (Busy Bees) taking on the contract with the potential to markedly improve service at equivalent cost.

The recommendation is to change supplier for managing the bins, and litter picking of the play areas, on FTC land from Somerset Council to Busy Bees as of 1 April 2026 at a cost of £55,829 to come from budget 700-7948 as agreed in the 18 February 2026 Council meeting. The reason for the recommendation is to improve levels of service from an undesirably low level following a sharp price rise from our existing contractor.

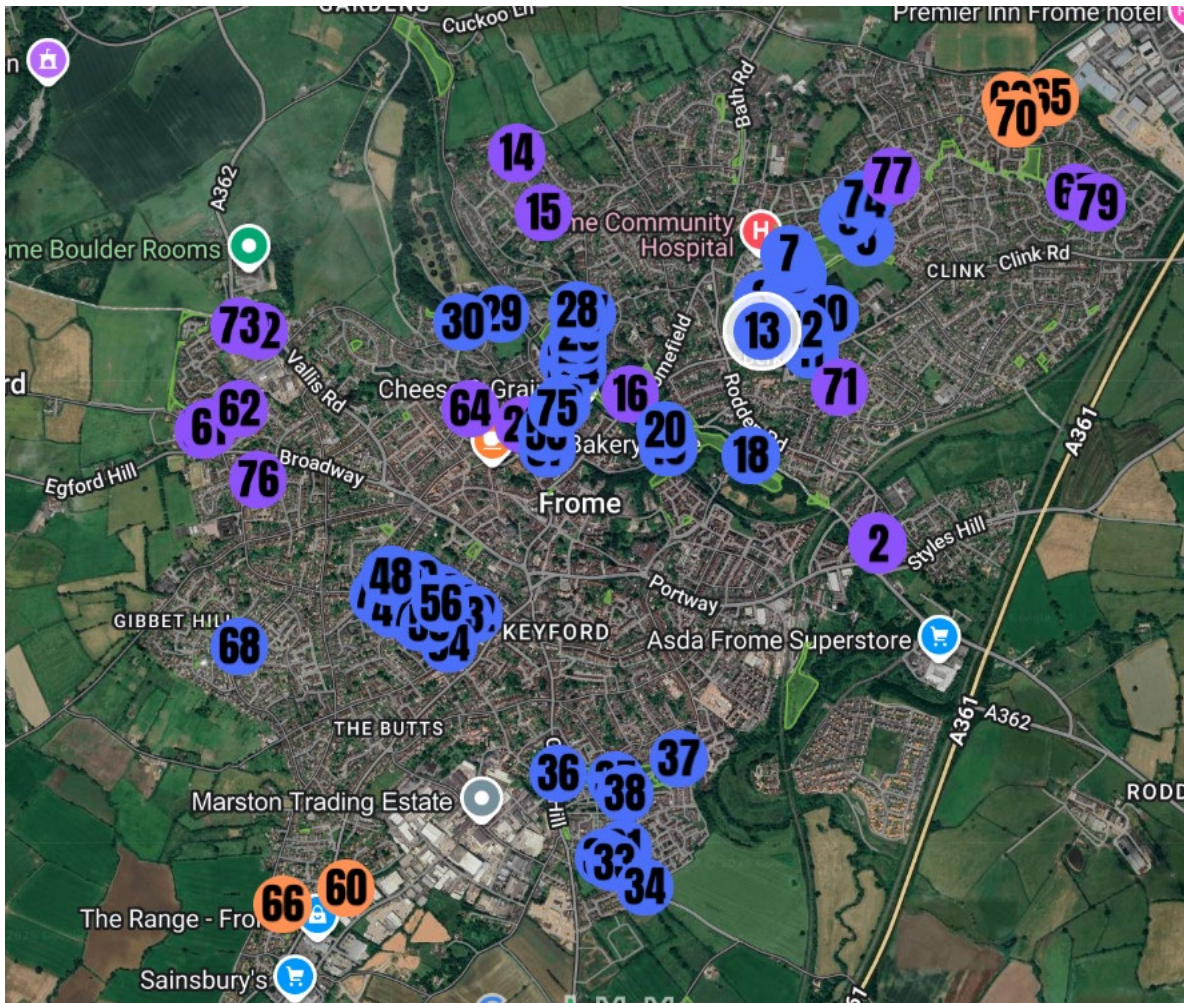
Background

For many years Idverde managed the emptying of the 69 bins on FTC land but they ceased to operate in the Frome area following SC taking in-house the waste services for the public realm.

This change coincided with FTC taking on more land, and hence more bins, under the devolution process from SC. Since June 2025, the number of bins FTC managed had gone up to 80.

During the Idverde contract there had been repeated instances of bins being unemptied for several days. The issues were logged and reported each time they were recorded but service levels remained largely unchanged.

Figure 1 – 80 FTC managed bins. Blue-emptied every day, Purple-every other day, Orange-twice weekly,



When SC took over the running of the street cleansing service in the East Somerset area Idverde ceased to operate in the Frome area. Prior to Idverde ending their contract FTC went out to tender for the bin emptying service and obtained 3 quotes. SC came in at Mid £30k, Busy Bees at mid £50k and Glendale at mid £80k.

SC were by a significant margin the lowest quote, were to set to become the sole operator in the surrounding public realm, were compliant and could demonstrate clear ability to operate at scale. On that basis they were awarded the contract: a 9 month Service Level Agreement that started in June 2025 and would run to March 2026.

In the last 9 months the service issues that had been experienced under Idverde have been broadly unchanged under SC. Service decline seemed to result during periods of staff absence from the regular team. 11 reports of bins not having been emptied were made to SC were made between October to December 2025.

Figure 2 - Examples of bins unemptied by SC in 2025/26



The contract with SC covers not only the emptying of the bins themselves but also litter picking within the play areas but this has also not been consistently undertaken.

In January 2026 SC advised that they would be increasing the cost of their service by 59% to £54,000.

Given the significant increase in costs, together with ongoing issues with the level of service, FTC have reviewed the alternative service providers from the original 3 quotes.

Busy Bees were significantly cheaper than the third quote and provided a price that is now closely comparable to the revised SC quote. In addition they are local and have demonstrated a commitment to very high levels of service on several previous projects with FTC (including some that have proved very demanding, for example the cleaning of the market yard toilets).

Busy Bees have re-quoted for starting a new contract in April 2026 that covers the 80 bins and the litter picking of the play areas. In their quote they have addressed the issue of occasional absences from the regular team by committing to providing a rota with consistently high levels of attendance, including at weekends and bank holidays.

Given their commitment and proven ability to provide very high level of service, at effectively the same price as SC and £30k below the 3rd quote we had received, the recommendation is to appoint Busy Bees to manage the waste across FTC's open spaces.

Other options considered

- The third supplier who quoted, Glendale, came in £30k higher at £85k.
- The option of undertaking the works in house has been ruled out due to the high staff costs, the difficulties with providing reliable 364 day cover, the complications of having

the necessary levels of compliance including waste transfer certification, the challenges of waste storage and the risks of waste piling due to non-collection, the capital costs for purchasing and running extra caged trucks.

Consultation and feedback

- There have been extensive sharing of the issue of low service levels on social media and direct to councillors

Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan

- This proposal links to Aim 4 of the council plan to improve assets and infrastructure (by ensuring Frome's physical infrastructure and assets support future growth and community needs).

Financial and Risk Implications

- The cost will be £55,829. Without changing supplier there would be reputational and financial risk of increasing costs by 59% without any prospect of service levels improving.

Equalities Implications

- None

Community Safety Implications

- Some risk to public health from unemptied bins under current service levels.

Climate Change and Sustainability Implications

- There may be scope for increasing levels of waste recycling with the new supplier

Background papers

- None

Report sign off

Peter Wheelhouse, Acting Town Clerk 19/03/26

Recommendation

To change supplier for managing the bins, and litter picking of the play areas, on FTC land from Somerset Council to Busy Bees as of 1 April 2026 at a cost of £55,829.