

Agenda item 3

For decision - Objectives for a new Frome Town Council Website

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Summary (incl. recommendations)

For Frome Town Council, the website is a core piece of infrastructure bringing together information about our work, places and spaces and supporting the transparency of our decision making. Our website also enables My Frome engagement and a CRM-backed FIND directory to create a single, trusted, accessible platform that connects residents to information, support and each other while improving efficiency and insight for Frome Town Council. As agreed in the 26/27 Work Programme, there is a commitment to develop a new website and this report sets out some proposed objectives for approval.

Recommendations

1. To agree the objectives for the new website
2. Delegate authority to the Marketing and Communications Manager in consultation with the Leader and the Town Clerk to develop a brief, oversee the procurement process and to commission a new website

The benefits of our website

For Frome Town Council, the website is no longer simply a place to publish information. It is the front facing element of the council, the portal to all our work, and it communicates and serves the town. For most residents, the website is the first point of contact with the council, and often the only one. It shapes how people understand what we do, how decisions are made and signposts to services and shows how to get involved. If that experience is clear, accessible and reliable, it builds confidence. If it is confusing or out of date, it creates frustration and undermines trust. It is the only true narrative that we can secure and it is how we face Frome Town Council to the world.

A good searchable website is also central to transparency and accountability. As expectations of openness and transparency increase, residents want to see not only what decisions have been made, but also why. The website provides a platform to present this information clearly and consistently, helping to reduce misinformation and support informed local decision making.

At the same time, a well-designed website plays a practical role in our day-to-day operations. By making information easy to find and understand, it reduces the volume of routine enquiries coming into the council, freeing up staff time and improving efficiency across teams. It has over 15000 true hits a month – where people are actively engaging with our content - so in this sense, every page is not just communication, but part of a signposting service that we pride ourselves on. However, that service is only as good as the information behind it, so it is

essential that content remains relevant and up to date — particularly for listing services such as FIND.

This part of the website acts as a connector for the whole community. By bringing together information about local groups, services and activities, we can help residents find support, reduce isolation and strengthen the visibility of Frome's voluntary and community sector. This becomes especially powerful when supported by a well-managed, searchable directory of local community organisations, which is a key ambition for the new website and will be revelatory for FIND.

Similarly, through integration with Discover Frome, the website can promote events, support local businesses and reinforce Frome's reputation as a creative, independent and vibrant place.

Importantly, a modern website is not just a publishing tool but a source of insight. It can reveal what people are searching for, what searches and services are most in demand and where there may be gaps in provision which goes beyond Google analytics. This data can directly help inform decision-making and help us to respond more effectively to local need.

The new FTC website

There is a commitment within the 26/27 Work programme to developing a new website. This will provide the foundation for future signposting and service delivery. As more interactions move online and we take on new responsibilities, we need a flexible, scalable platform that can evolve, incorporating new tools, improve access and continue to meet the needs of our community. In this context, the website is best understood not simply as a communications channel, but as essential infrastructure and key to being bold and effective: a trusted source of all our news, a signposting platform, a transparency tool and an important connection between us, as a council, and the residents of Frome.

In a town like Frome, where there is a strong culture of participation, the website also plays an important democratic role. It enables residents to engage with consultations, understand council processes and take part in shaping local decisions. With the integration of My Frome, this digital gateway becomes even more important and without it, participation risks being limited to those already closely connected. It is therefore essential that our website remains a trusted and accessible source of information for everyone.

Objectives for the new website

The proposed objectives for the new website are therefore as follows:

1. Improve access to information, services and support
Make it quick and easy for residents to find accurate, up-to-date information, access council services and signpost to navigate to the support they need.
2. Strengthen transparency and trust
Clearly communicate decisions, priorities and spending, helping residents understand what the council is doing and why.

3. Integrate and amplify engagement (My Frome)

Act as a clear gateway to My Frome, ensuring consultations, projects and opportunities to participate are visible, easy to access and well understood.

4. Create a single, trusted source of community information (FIND)

Transform FIND and other listings into a CRM-backed, searchable and maintainable directory of community organisations, services and activities.

5. Act as a community connector

Help residents discover local groups, opportunities and support, strengthening Frome’s voluntary and community sector and reducing isolation.

6. Reduce demand on staff through effective signposting

Provide clear, intuitive journeys that answer common queries and direct users to the right place first time - whether council services, information about places and spaces, FIND listings or My Frome.

7. Provide a robust, usable data asset

Develop a structured, exportable and searchable dataset of community organisations and services that supports both public use and internal insight.

8. Support the local economy and town identity

Work alongside Discover Frome to promote events, businesses and local activity, reinforcing Frome’s identity as a vibrant, independent town.

9. Generate insight to inform decision-making

Use website data, search behaviour and directory usage to understand local need, identify gaps in provision and support evidence-based decisions.

10. Ensure accessibility and inclusion

Deliver an accessible, plain English website that works for all users, including those with low digital confidence, and improves visibility of services for underrepresented groups.

We have £17,000 in the budget for this piece of work. However, we will brief for an exemplar website and expect best value.

<p>Other options considered</p>	<p>A number of alternative approaches have been considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do nothing / retain the existing website This would avoid immediate cost but would not address current limitations around usability, content management and the lack of a structured, searchable community dataset. It would also constrain future digital service delivery and increase pressure on staff. • Incremental improvements to the existing site While lower cost in the short term, this would not resolve underlying structural issues, particularly around CRM capability,
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	<p>integration and scalability. There is a risk of continued inefficiency and duplication.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standalone directory solution Developing or procuring a separate directory platform was considered. However, this would risk fragmentation, duplication of data and a poorer user experience, rather than providing a single, integrated digital front door. • Outsourced or third-party managed listings This option would reduce internal management but would limit control over data quality, governance and alignment with council priorities. <p>The preferred option is a full website redevelopment with integrated CRM-backed directory, providing a single, scalable and future-proof platform.</p>
<p>Key considerations for the Council</p>	<p>Key considerations for the Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The website is increasingly a core service delivery tool, not just a communications channel • There is a clear need to improve usability, accessibility and searchability • A structured, maintainable dataset of community organisations is a strategic gap • The solution must be manageable by staff and reduce ongoing workload • Integration with existing platforms (e.g. engagement and destination marketing) is essential • The approach must be compliant with public sector procurement, accessibility and data standards • The platform should be scalable to support potential future responsibilities, including those arising from devolution
<p>Consultation and feedback</p>	<p>This proposal is informed by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff experience of handling routine enquiries and fragmented content • Learning from the recent project ‘How we communicate’ where FTC website was identified as a trusted source of information and that clear, central information was required <p>Further user testing will be undertaken during the discovery phase.</p>
<p>Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan</p>	<p>Supports all Council Plan priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community wellbeing – improved access to services and support • Thriving town – promotion of events, businesses and activity • Sustainability – reduced reliance on print • Infrastructure – investment in digital infrastructure

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective council – improved transparency, engagement and efficiency <p>Also supports the Medium-Term Financial Plan through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased efficiency and reduced staff time • Better data to inform decisions • A scalable platform reducing future costs
Financial and Risk Implications	<p>Financial:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upfront capital cost (build and implementation) • Ongoing revenue costs (hosting, support, licensing) • Efficiency savings over time <p>Risks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery risk – mitigated through procurement • Adoption risk – mitigated through design and training • Data quality (directory) – mitigated through CRM and moderation
Legal / HR Implications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GDPR compliance required • Clear data ownership and processing arrangements • Procurement via recognised public sector frameworks • No direct HR implications; staff training required • Changes to workflows to be defined
Equalities Implications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WCAG 2.2 AA compliance • Plain English content • Improved access for users with low digital confidence • Better visibility of services for underrepresented groups <p>EIA to be completed as part of the project.</p>
Community Safety Implications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved access to support signposting • Supports early intervention and awareness • Trusted platform for public safety information • Moderation of directory content
Climate Change and Sustainability Implications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports digital-first approach, reducing print • Encourages local service use • Efficient digital infrastructure • Consideration of low-impact hosting and the ramifications of the use of AI
Health and Safety Implications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No direct risks • Indirect benefits through improved access to support and information

Constitutional Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subject to committee approval • Procurement in line with financial regulations • Any significant spend to be formally approved • Ongoing reporting to Members
Background Papers	https://www.frometowncouncil.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Agenda-item-4-For-decision-Results-of-survey-about-how-effective-FTC-communications-are.pdf
Report Sign-Off	Peter Wheelhouse, Town Clerk 29/04/26

Recommendations

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