

Agenda item 5

For information & discussion – My Frome update and next steps

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Summary

The My Frome platform launched in late February 2026, with FTC being the first town council to use the Go Vocal platform. There are currently 330 registered users and have been 483 participants. Early activities on the platform have allowed residents to have their say on the future of toilet provision in Frome, share ideas for Market Yard and vote on play options for the Community Woodland.

There has been a good quality of replies, and a growing interest from staff teams and community organisations in using the platform. There have also been some challenges within the first couple of months, including features that do not work the way we expected.

My Frome will be an important part of upcoming projects including engagement around the Brunel Green corridor, Frome Movement and Place Plan, and a Citizen Climate Survey which will feed into climate dashboards for Frome.

At the meeting, we will hold a discussion: How can we use the platform to further increase direct democracy in Frome?

Background

The need for an online space for engagement was identified in the Frome Town Council Plan 2025-27. Various platforms were considered by a working group comprised of Fiona Barrows, Carla Collinette, Hannah Stopford, Rachel Griffin and Miles Macey. A comparison of costs and functionality was brought to Council in August 2025 and councillors agreed the recommendation to sign a 2-year contract with Go Vocal as the platform provider. The contract includes a 30% discount on the first year (£10,500) with the second year costing £15,000.

The 30% discount is provided as part of a value exchange to inform Go Vocal's offer to town/parish councils as Frome Town Council is the first council at this level to adopt the platform. Over the due diligence process we heard very positive feedback from district and county councils using the platform.

The platform launched in late February 2026, with engagement opportunities around toilet provision in the town centre and the wider Market Yard area.

Progress to date

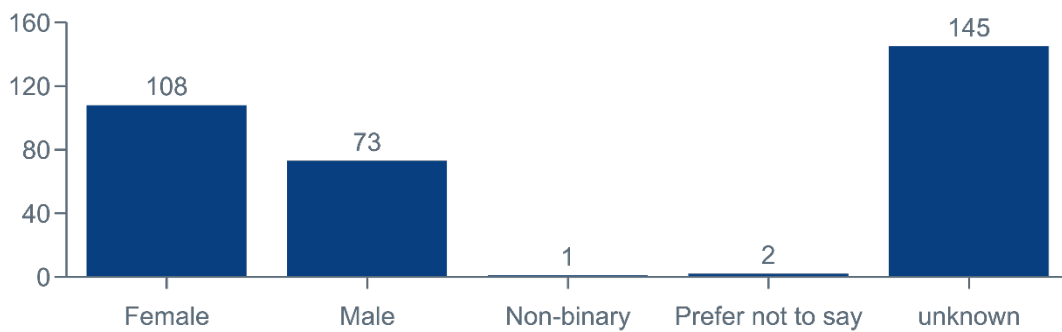
We would encourage everyone reading this report to visit the platform to get a proper feel of it: <https://myfrome.frometowncouncil.gov.uk/en-GB/>

330 people have signed up to the platform and 483 people have participated (people were able to complete the survey about toilet provision without signing up).

During the sign-up process and as part of participating in some activities, we ask people some optional demographic questions. These allow us to see who we are reaching through the platform and where there are gaps.

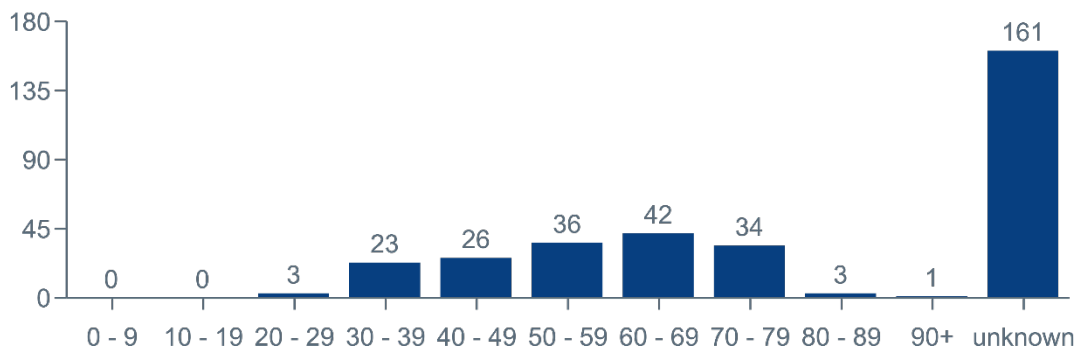
Gender:

59% of platform users are female, 40% male and 1% non-binary.



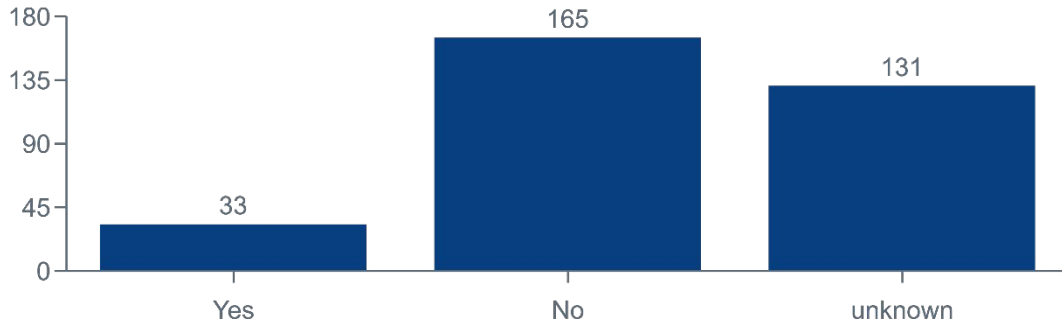
Age:

Over 50s are disproportionately represented on the platform. This is consistent with previous engagement where we have collected age data, e.g. through Survey Monkey, where there have been very few respondents under 30. In-person engagement where we talk to people where they have been an important part of reaching underrepresented age groups. For example, we talked to a younger set of people outside a K-Pop themed event at the Cheese and Grain.



Disability:

Of those who answered, 17% say they consider themselves to have a disability and 83% say they don't. In the 2021 census, 18.7% of Somerset residents said their "day-to-day activities were limited to some extent due to disability or a long-term health condition", which would meet the definition of being disabled under the Equality Act. It is important to note that some people who meet this definition may not consider themselves to have a disability.



Council ward or area:

Of those who chose to answer, there is a fairly good spread of locations with larger wards generally having more people on the platform.

Ward/area	People	%
Berkley Down	21	6
College	19	6
Highpoint	7	2
Innox	10	3
Keyford	49	15
Market	31	9
Oakfield	22	7
Park	25	8
Surrounding area/villages (e.g. Nunney, Beckington)	14	4
Further afield with an interest in Frome	11	3
No answer	120	37

Traffic and devices:

64% of traffic to the site has been via direct entry (e.g. typing the address into your browser, rather than clicking from somewhere) which suggests that outreach through postcards and press releases has been effective. 27% of traffic is from social networks – almost exclusively through Facebook. 6% is through websites, including a BBC article which resulted in 99 visitors, and 3% through search engines. The site is accessed on mobile in 53% of cases.

Brief overviews by project

All projects here are viewable on My Frome if you would like to look at them in more detail.

- **Toilets in the town centre:** Across the survey and quick activity there were 350 responses online. The responses allowed a data summary to accompany the report to council and the recommendations and decision were rooted in what we heard from the public. Those who signed up to the platform and took the survey were sent an update email and the project page has been updated to explain what the next steps are.
- **Market Yard:** 35 people have participated in “Share your ideas for Market Yard”. We have been pleased by the quality of responses and some of the thoughtful and respectful conversations happening. This exercise is currently still open. The ideas will help us

understand what people want from Market Yard and provide an interesting starting point for further work.

- **Shaping Frome's cultural story:** There have only been nine participants but the responses have been of a high quality. If Frome is shortlisted for the Town of Culture competition, we expect to engage much more widely and see a lot of interest and enthusiasm.
- **Community woodland play options:** There were a lot more votes offline than online due to the nature of the activity. However, we were easily able to combine the online and offline votes on the platform, allowing anyone interested to see what the winners were. We will communicate the next steps to people once there is a final plan in place for adding play and information features.
- **Victoria Park Community Café survey:** Our first collaboration with a community organisation. We are hosting the café's survey to help them plan their 2026 season and understand what people would like to see at the café. There have been 28 responses at the time of writing.
- **The Key Centre listening fortnight:** At the time of writing this project is in its first day. The 4-question survey on My Frome will support the in-person activities which include door knocking and drop-in sessions with Community Engagement Officer Liz Stone.

Challenges

While our overall experience has been positive, we have encountered some limitations of the platform and experienced some challenges as a result of the learning curve that can be expected from being the first town council to adopt a platform that is shaped around the uses and resources of much larger organisations. We have found the support team at Go Vocal to be responsive and generally reply to any queries or reports in a quick and helpful manner.

Platform issues

- **Small-scale mapping:** Go Vocal has options for marking things on a map publicly (sharing ideas, reporting issues) or privately in a survey. However, it does not allow us to upload our own map to be used in the same way, e.g. the map of the proposed skatepark design. This sort of functionality will be vital to engaging around different parks and open spaces.
 - We are pressing Go Vocal to provide this feature.
 - Miles is exploring whether available integrations with other tools (Konveio and ESRI/ArcGIS) might open up more possibilities.
- **Hybrid engagement integration:** We would like to be able to capture audio responses (e.g. in conversations on doorsteps) and easily include these with the written online responses. Our Go Vocal contract includes use of a tool called Echo which is designed to make this easier. However, it seems that Echo is not integrated into the platform in the way we thought and so including recorded conversations is not as simple as we hoped it would be.
 - We are raising this issue with Go Vocal. A big focus of their product roadmap for 2026 is hybrid engagement so we hope to see some improvement in this area.
- **Data download and reports:** The way data is presented to us in the back end of the website is great, but data exporting does not work as well as we would like. We think

there is potential for a lot of improvements to reduce the amount of staff time needed to make reports ready for the public to view.

- There are a number of smaller issues or changes we would like to see, which we are talking with Go Vocal about.

Room for improvement within FTC

- Staff and others do not always understand how the platform can be used. We would like a range of activities on the platform and are working to encourage staff and others to consider all options instead of defaulting to surveys.
- Confusion and minor issues have arisen from unclear internal processes. We have learned a lot from our first 2 months of using the platform and will now work to implement a more robust internal process for deciding which projects go on to the platform and when, assigning responsibilities and improving staff confidence in using the platform.

What's next

We will continue conversations with Go Vocal around the issues we have identified above, and work on creating a straightforward internal process. There are many projects being explored or coming to the platform over the next few months. These include:

- Brunel Green corridor engagement – the online activities will complement a lively schedule of in-person activities to involve the community in creating a vision for the connected green spaces that make up this corridor. (Lead: Communities Team)
- Citizen Climate Survey – a citizen science project to gather data about energy usage and other things that impact climate, to feed into climate data “dashboards” for Frome (Lead: Matt Mellen, Climate Action Lead)
- Frome Movement and Place Plan – My Frome will be used to understand how people travel, what challenges they face and what changes they would like to see, including identifying priorities on a map (Lead: Owen King, Planning & Development Project Officer)
- Retrofit/Home energy discussion group – we have asked Caroline Wajsblum, Energy Advice Volunteer Co-ordinator, to host a discussion group on the platform to explore how well the platform works for this kind of use.
- Staff wellbeing/feedback area – we are exploring how My Frome can be used to share wellbeing resources for staff, and perhaps be a place for internal engagement or feedback (Leads: Laura Flaherty, HR Lead & Executive Assistant and Sian James, Business and HR Administrator)
- Community organisations – We are exploring how the platform can be of value to community groups and organisations and hope is that this will lead to use of participatory budgeting of the community organisation support budget. (Lead: Hannah Stopford, Community and Partnerships Development Manager)
- Continued updates – we will use the platform to provide updates, for example letting people know when there is news on toilets in Market Yard. This allows those who participated to easily find out what is happening and understand how their contribution

helped shape the outcome and potentially for this to be the conduit for the community organisation newsletter.

Key considerations for the Council	The value of the platform depends a lot on encouraging people to sign up and take part. We would encourage councillors to visit the platform from time to time to see what's happening there and direct their residents to the platform as a way to influence local decision-making. Postcards are always available from the front desk here and at the Key Centre, which are convenient to hand out in conversations.
Consultation and feedback	We plan to collect feedback about the platform from users every 6 months so we can continue to improve the experience. The working group continues to meet periodically to share insights.
Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan	The Frome Town Council Plan 2025-27 included the following key outcome in Aim Five: "More participation in council decision-making, and use of a new civic engagement digital platform" The 2026-27 Work Programme includes the following objective: Establish an innovative digital platform (GoVocal), aiming for 10% of residents contributing Both documents mentioned above include multiple objectives that involve engagement and co-design with communities, which My Frome will support.
Financial and Risk Implications	The cost of the Go Vocal platform is included in the 2026-27 Budget.
Legal / HR Implications	None
Equalities Implications	Demographics are monitored to identify gaps in who we are hearing from and understand when there are differences of view along demographic lines. In-person engagement continues to be a vital part of our strategy and allows us to reach people who may not be confident or able to engage online. It is worth noting that the online platform also allows us to reach people who may not feel comfortable talking to us in-person, so both in-person and online engagement have an important role to play in helping us reach as many people as possible.
Community Safety Implications	In any forum with open discussion, there is a risk of disagreements devolving into offensive language, personal attacks and harassment. So far we have seen only respectful and constructive conversation between users. A moderation policy is in place to allow us to remove any comments that cross a line and auto-moderation allows us to review comments that could be offensive before they are published.
Climate Change and Sustainability Implications	Go Vocal is a certified B Corp. Care is taken over deciding when it is appropriate to use the AI tools built into the platform My Frome will be used to support projects with aspects that address the Climate and Ecological Emergency such as the upcoming Citizen Climate Survey and the Frome Movement and Place Plan.

Health and Safety Implications	None
Health and Wellbeing Implications	None
Constitutional Requirements	None
Background Papers	None
Report Sign-Off (if appropriate)	Peter Wheelhouse, Town Clerk 23/04/26

Discussion

At the Community and Place Committee meeting, we will hold a discussion: How can we use the platform to further increase direct democracy in Frome?