

Agenda item 4

For discussion - Review of graffiti situation in Frome

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Summary

This report sets out the graffiti situation in Frome, gives the background around what Frome Town Council are doing, what powers the police have, identifies stakeholders and positive alternatives to help inform a solution focussed town wide discussion at the meeting.

Background

Graffiti and tagging in Frome appear to be increasing and are affecting the presentation of the town and its public spaces. This has implications not only for the local environment but also for the attractiveness of the town centre, potentially reducing visitor numbers, dwell time, and spend with local businesses.

While Frome is not unique in experiencing this issue (though it appears to be among the most affected towns in the former Mendip area), local challenges require locally coordinated responses. There is clear community interest in improving the appearance of Frome and supporting the vitality of the town centre, particularly at a time when urban footfall is declining nationally.

Frome Town Council (FTC) does not hold enforcement powers or primary responsibility for the public realm, nor does it receive council tax funding for this purpose. Its remit is limited to land it owns. However, FTC has taken an active role within the town centre and has developed considerable experience in managing graffiti in this area.

Experience to Date

A key challenge in addressing graffiti is that cleaned or repainted surfaces are often quickly retagged. In some cases, freshly restored surfaces can attract further tagging. While a tag can be applied in seconds, removal can take hours.

Within the town centre, FTC's ranger has committed as much time as feasible to maintaining a graffiti-free environment. An initial zero-tolerance approach—removing new tags immediately—led to a marked improvement in appearance. However, this approach also appeared to encourage further tagging, with newly restored surfaces becoming a target. This model is not sustainable with limited staffing. As a result, FTC now undertakes periodic “resets,” restoring the town centre to a high standard at key times of year (for example, before major events or after school holidays). Interim maintenance focuses on cleaning rather than repainting.

This approach prevents a steady decline in the town centre's appearance and delivers noticeable improvements, particularly before key events. However, it remains resource-intensive and does not provide a permanent solution.



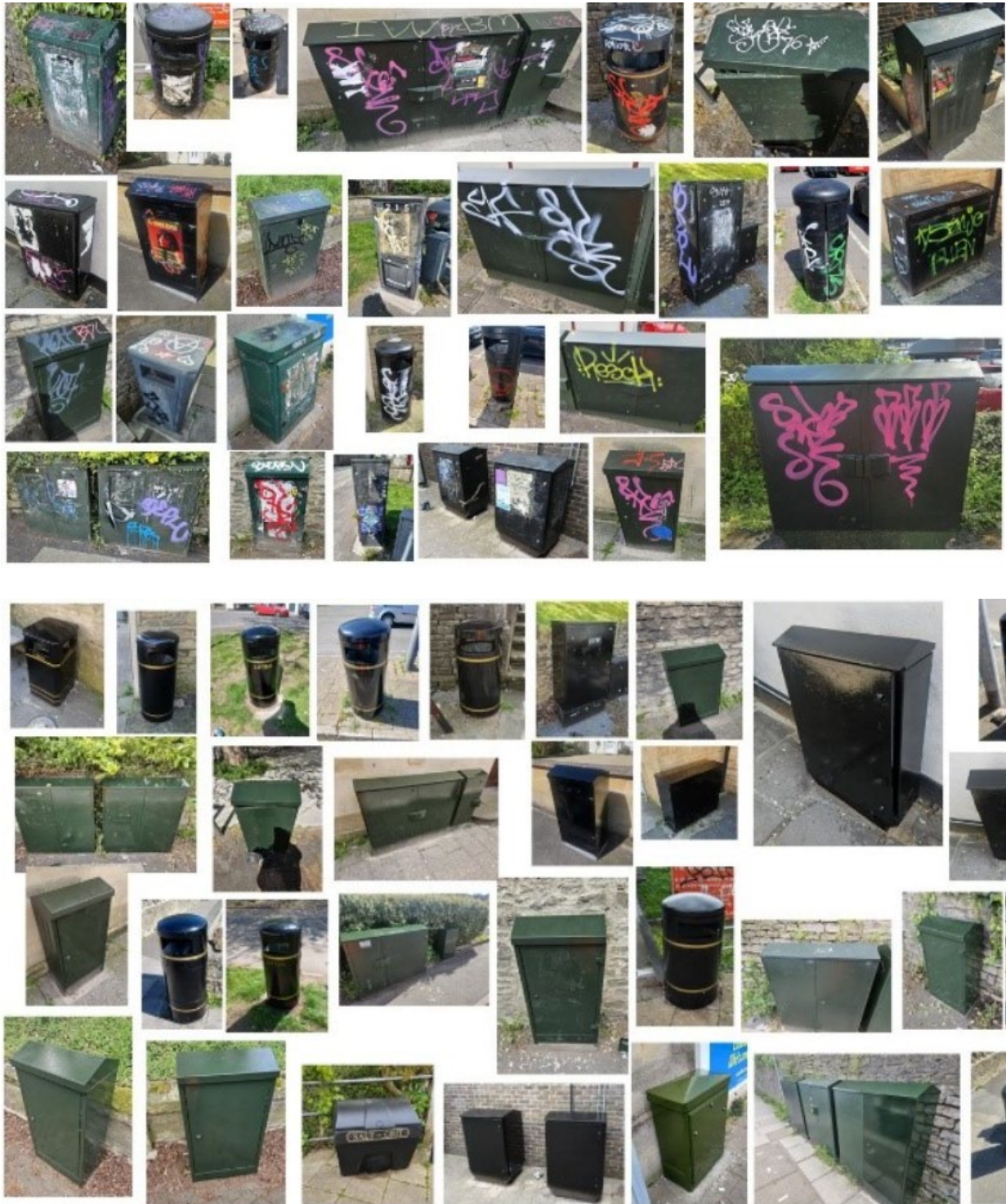
The resource implications of this approach are:

- Approximately 50 items (30 bins and 20 junction boxes) are maintained.
- A full reset takes around 10 working days.
- Five resets per year equate to roughly 50 days, or 20% of a full-time post.
- Annual material costs are approximately £3,000 (£2,000 for resets and £1,200 for interim cleaning).
- There is also a significant opportunity cost, as staff time dedicated to graffiti removal reduces capacity for other town centre initiatives.
- A full reset typically results in a high-quality presentation lasting several weeks. However, within around six weeks, up to 80% of cleaned surfaces are retagged. This highlights the limited durability of current interventions and the resource implications of extending similar work across the wider town.

Before and after the graffiti reset in the town centre in November 2025



Before and after the graffiti reset in the town centre 6 months later in April 2026



Stakeholders

Graffiti is a town-wide issue affecting multiple land and property owners and stakeholders. Effective responses therefore require coordinated action.

Key stakeholders include:

- Somerset Council who are responsible for managing the public realm, including the roads and pavements and own most of the public bins and bus shelters and highways signs
- The utilities companies who own the junction boxes that are frequently targeted for tagging
- Local businesses and community organisations that own buildings and manage the area in the immediate vicinity of their business / commercial premises
- As well as the residents of a local neighbourhood

An example of a key stakeholder making a positive difference to the graffiti situation is the Somerset Council highways team who are planning a targeted clean of approximately 27 highway signs along a key route through Frome. This work requires specialist handling to avoid damaging reflective surfaces and must be carried out safely due to roadside conditions.

A broader question is whether similar proactive approaches could be adopted by other stakeholders. Businesses, in particular, can play a role by maintaining clean and well-presented frontages, which can help deter further vandalism. Evidence suggests that poorly maintained environments are more likely to attract repeat offending.

See below an example of graffiti on highways signage at Fromefield managed, and recently cleaned, by Somerset Council



Community Initiatives

There is potential for community involvement in improving local presentation, building on existing initiatives such as the Litter Warriors and Frome Hoedown. However, graffiti removal presents practical challenges.

These include:

- Safe handling and storage of cleaning chemicals
- Risks associated with working near roads
- Working at height

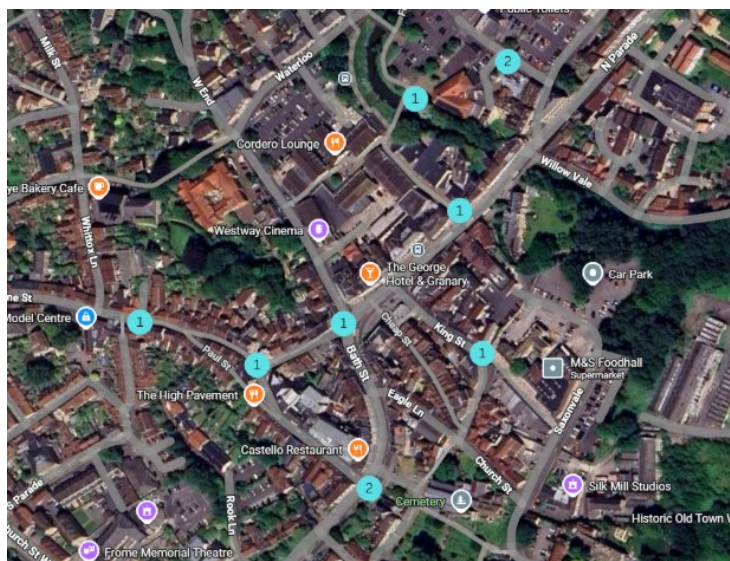
While community participation can support reporting and general upkeep, any direct removal activity must be carefully managed to ensure safety and compliance with legal requirements. Activities should only be undertaken where risks are understood and appropriately mitigated.

Enforcement, Police, and CCTV

Graffiti is a criminal offence under the [Criminal Damage Act 1971](#). Reporting incidents is essential, as police priorities are intelligence-led and depend on reported data. Incidents can be reported to Avon and Somerset Police via 101 or [online](#). Crimes in progress should be reported via 999. The police encourage reporting of all graffiti incidents even if the property affected is not owned by the person reporting it (e.g. when tagging is on SC owned street furniture). A major challenge at the moment is the very low level of reporting of graffiti incidents and hence the difficulty this presents for police allocating intelligence-driven resources.

CCTV in the town centre, funded by FTC and monitored by Somerset Council, can support evidence gathering. However, its effectiveness is limited by factors such as image quality and identification challenges. While CCTV may act as a deterrent, it plays a more limited role in securing prosecutions.

Location of public CCTV in the town centre



Education and Positive Alternatives

Education and engagement with young people can help address the root causes of graffiti. Schools, colleges, and community groups can raise awareness of the social and economic impacts of tagging, including the financial and opportunity costs of removal.

Providing constructive alternatives is also important. Initiatives such as mural projects, public art programmes, and designated graffiti spaces can channel creativity positively while enhancing the public realm.

These schemes can:

- Deter tagging by replacing blank surfaces
- Enhance visual appeal
- Encourage footfall and local pride

Frome Town Council already supports graffiti art in designated locations such as Welshmill and Mary Baily. One option could be to consider additional graffiti walls for instance at FTC owned Tower View or the more challenging mixed ownership, but higher profile, space of the town centre itself.

FTC has also commissioned various public artworks. Expanding this approach for example, through a utility box art trail could be explored, subject to considerations around cost, permissions, and conservation area requirements. A report follows this discussion on a suggested next step.

Graffiti walls in Welshmill Park and Mary Baily



Murals near the Westway and on the building in Victoria Park.



There may also be value in strengthening existing educational engagement, including working with police and youth organisations to embed discussions about graffiti and its impacts into a regular programme.

Other options considered	Continue with the current approach, increase resources, or cease proactive removal. These were discounted as solutions due to cost or limited effectiveness.
Key considerations for the Council	Balancing the appearance of the town with available resources, partnership working and long-term solutions.
Consultation and feedback	Officers have engaged with Somerset Council, businesses and other stakeholders through ongoing operational work.
Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan	
Financial and Risk Implications	Current approach has ongoing staffing and material costs. Additional work would require further resources
Legal / HR Implications	Graffiti is a criminal offence. Removal activities must comply with health and safety requirements
Equalities Implications	A well-maintained public realm benefits all residents and visitors
Community Safety Implications	Improved reporting, maintenance and education may help reduce antisocial behaviour and improve perceptions of safety
Climate Change and Sustainability Implications	Prioritises maintaining existing infrastructure and minimising waste through repair rather than replacement
Health and Safety Implications	Appropriate risk assessments, COSHH and manual handling procedures are required for graffiti removal
Constitutional Requirements	Community and Place Committee discussion
Background Papers	Graffiti Review Report; Council Plan
Report Sign-Off	Peter Wheelhouse, Town Clerk 15/07/26

Discussion

What can Frome do as a town to improve the graffiti situation?