Minutes of a meeting of Frome Town Council

Wednesday 7 October 2026, 7pm
Frome Town Hall and Zoom

Present:
In the Town Hall: Tracey Ashford, Philip Campagna, Carla Collenette, Mark Dorrington (Chair), Nick Dove, Anne Hills, Andy Jones, Polly Lamb, Richard Pinnock, Steve Tanner

On Zoom: Fiona Barrows, Lyndsey Mayhew

In attendance:
Adam Boyden (SC Cllr, online), Peter Wheelhouse (Town Clerk), Rob Holden (Environment Manager), Sarah Williams (Business Manager & RFO), Alastair Findlay (Facilities Manager), Jo Morris (Resilience Officer), Owen King (Planning and Development Project Officer), Sian James (Business and HR Administrator), Noah Hardy (Support Steward)

5 members of the public were in attendance at the Town Hall
1 member of the public was in attendance on Zoom.

To watch the discussion in full visit: www.youtube.com/watch?v=UDPUsfaFrno

Minute Ref	Agenda Item	Action
2026/100/FC	The meeting started at 7pm. 1a. Apologies for absence Polly Lamb proposed to accept apologies from Sara Butler, Anita Collier, Lisa Merryweather, Andy Wrintmore and Ben Still (sent via email before the meeting and acknowledged but not read out at the meeting) and from Fiona Barrows and Lyndsey Mayhew who attended online, seconded by Philip Campagna, agreed unanimously. 1b. Declarations of members' interests None were received. 1c. Dispensations None were received. 1d. Approval of minutes from the last meeting on 9 September 2026 Peter Wheelhouse noted an administrative error in the attendance records, whereby Anne Hills had mistakenly been listed as both present and absent. The minutes were corrected. Peter also provided an update relating to concerns raised at the previous meeting by Kerry Meech of the Friends of Frome Library.	

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	Peter reported that he had contacted Darren Smart, Head of Library Services at Somerset Council, regarding concerns around maintenance and management of the library building. He advised Cllrs that repairs to the heating system were underway and expected to be completed imminently. Temporary arrangements were also being prepared should the weather deteriorate before repairs were finalised. Peter also gave an update regarding issues associated with rough sleeping near the library, explaining that Somerset Council was actively considering solutions in conjunction with relevant agencies. On the question of building maintenance, he stated that Somerset Council had significantly reduced window cleaning services across its estate due to financial constraints but had indicated that community groups could fund such maintenance if they wished. He further advised that the fly-tipping issue reported previously was being addressed through the facilities management team. Finally, he relayed assurance from Somerset Council that Frome Library remained one of its key sites and would continue to operate as a council run facility despite ongoing financial pressures. Cllrs agreed that this information should be fed back directly to Kerry Meech. The minutes of the Council meeting held on 9 September 2026 were approved as a true record of the meeting and signed by the Chair. Proposed by Tracey Ashford, seconded by Steve Tanner, agreed unanimously.	
2026/101/FC	2. Questions from public and Cllrs Suzy Cristinacce of Frome Birth Talk informed the Council about the charity's growing financial challenges despite its vital work supporting parents experiencing perinatal mental health difficulties, birth trauma, and pregnancy or baby loss. She explained that the organisation provided counselling and community support through a combination of professional staff and volunteers. Although the charity had historically been successful in securing grant funding, funding applications during 2026 had been largely unsuccessful. Applications totalling around £260,000 were submitted to 30 funders, but only £9,000 was awarded. As a result, trustees were forced to consider closing the counselling waiting list for the first time. An emergency fundraising appeal generated a strong response from the local community, raising more than £8,000 towards a £10,000 target.	

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	Suzy highlighted that the difficulties faced by Frome Birth Talk reflected wider challenges across the voluntary sector, with many charities increasingly filling gaps in statutory services while competing for diminishing funding opportunities. She stressed the need for broader discussions about the future sustainability of community based services and encouraged residents to support charities through regular monthly donations where possible. Fiona Barrows thanked Frome Birth Talk for its work and recognised the increasing financial pressures facing charitable organisations. She suggested FTC could help promote the charity's fundraising efforts and noted that the implications for local grant funding would need to be considered during future budget discussions. Tracy Ashford echoed these concerns, observing that organisations such as Frome Birth Talk, We Hear You and Purple Elephant were providing increasingly essential services within the community. She noted that the funding challenges facing such organisations had significant implications for the future provision of support services across Frome. Nick Dove raised concerns regarding rough sleepers located outside Frome Library, noting reports of anti-social behaviour and an incident involving a dog allegedly biting a member of the public. He expressed the view that Somerset Council, as landowner, should take responsibility for addressing the issue. Peter responded that Somerset Council was pursuing a range of actions, including involvement from its enforcement team and ongoing liaison with the police. While recognising Cllrs' concerns, he advised that Somerset Council had requested discretion regarding operational details. He agreed to reiterate the Council's concerns to relevant officers. Nick also reported concerns from residents in the Francis Fields development who had experienced difficulties receiving postal deliveries despite their properties being fully registered. The issue had reportedly been raised with Royal Mail and the local Member of Parliament. Fiona suggested the matter could also be raised through relevant Somerset Council channels. There was a lengthy discussion regarding Somerset Council's parking policies and wider financial position. Nick questioned whether proposals to harmonise parking charges across Somerset should include removing Sunday parking charges in Frome in the interests of fairness. Adam Boyden explained that recent proposals sought greater consistency whilst balancing the need to	

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	generate income within increasingly constrained local government finances. The discussion broadened into a debate about devolution and the extent to which FTC should subsidise services traditionally provided by principal authorities. Fiona argued strongly against a growing expectation that town councils should compensate for reductions in Somerset Council services. She emphasised that FTC had been deliberately cautious about taking on devolved responsibilities and could not become a replacement for the principal authority without compromising its own strategic priorities. Adam acknowledged the pressures facing Somerset Council, describing ongoing increases in spending on social care, homelessness and statutory services. However, he maintained that difficult decisions were unavoidable given limitations on council tax increases and other sources of revenue. Fiona responded that decisions about future priorities remained matters for FTC itself and should be considered through its established policy framework.	
2026/102/FC	3. For decision - Adoption of the Frome Nature Recovery Plan Sara Butler introduced the report via a pre recorded video as she was unable to attend the meeting. She highlighted the severe decline in biodiversity nationally, noting that the UK was among the most nature depleted countries in the world and that one in six species now faced the risk of extinction. She reminded Cllrs that FTC had declared a climate and ecological emergency in 2021 and argued that coordinated action was urgently needed. Rob Holden then explained that the plan had been developed as a response to this ecological emergency and represented a practical roadmap for helping nature recover across the town. He outlined evidence showing significant reductions in woodland, hedgerows, meadows and river health across the UK and explained how these trends threatened ecological stability, climate resilience and human wellbeing. Particular emphasis was placed on the importance of creating connected wildlife corridors through the town, with the River Frome identified as the single most significant biodiversity corridor. Rob explained how coordinated interventions would allow species to move more freely and adapt to environmental changes. Jo Morris described the extensive community involvement that would be required to deliver the plan. She outlined proposals for	

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	wildlife gardening advice, volunteer conservation projects, species monitoring, school engagement programmes and expanded citizen science initiatives. She argued that residents had a crucial role in supporting biodiversity through gardens, community spaces and local action. Owen King detailed how the plan would influence planning policy, ensuring biodiversity considerations became embedded in future development decisions. He explained how FTC would use the plan to inform planning consultations, contribute to the Somerset Local Plan and provide an evidence based framework for reviewing future planning policies and guidance. Cllrs welcomed the report. Nick Dove praised both its content and presentation, while commenting on the need to ensure developers fulfilled ecological commitments made through the planning process. Concerns were also raised regarding enforcement resources available to monitor biodiversity obligations on development sites. Other Cllrs highlighted the importance of education, community engagement and balancing the needs of wildlife with recreational use of open spaces. The recommendation was to adopt the Frome Nature Recovery Plan as Council policy and use the Plan to: a) Guide management of Council-owned land. b) Coordinate wildlife improvements across key nature corridors. c) Raise awareness of and interest in helping support local wildlife. d) Incorporate the principles of the plan into relevant planning policy. e) Empower community action. Proposed by Nick Dove, seconded by Steve Tanner, agreed unanimously.	
2026/103/FC	4. For decision - Adoption of the Avon Bioregional Charter for the River Frome Gemma Stone of Frome Families for the Future and Friends of the River Frome and Rob Holden presented the report. Gemma explained that the charter formed part of a growing national movement recognising the rights of rivers and waterways. Drawing on extensive community engagement work undertaken locally, she described how the charter sought to establish a shared set of principles recognising the River Frome's right to exist, thrive, flow sustainably, remain free from pollution and maintain biodiversity.	

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	She emphasised that the charter was not a legal instrument but a statement of values designed to influence future decision making and strengthen advocacy on behalf of the river. Gemma also outlined proposals to reinstate the River Frome Catchment Partnership and develop stronger coordination between stakeholders including landowners, environmental organisations, local authorities and statutory agencies. Fiona Barrows welcomed the proposal, noting that previous discussions about river rights had sometimes struggled to move beyond symbolism. She considered the charter's connection to practical actions within the Nature Recovery Plan particularly significant and argued that FTC's growing ownership of riverside land provided an opportunity to demonstrate leadership. The recommendations were: 1. To adopt the Avon Bioregional Charter and agree that the Charter principles are considered within relevant Council policies, projects and decision-making. 2. To explore the future appointment of a Community Guardian, or equivalent mechanism, to advocate for the River Frome and support community engagement with the Charter. Proposed by Carla Collenette, seconded by Anne Hills, agreed unanimously.	
2026/104/FC	5. For decision - Welshmill Riverbank Stabilisation Project Rob Holden explained that exceptionally high river flows earlier in the year had caused significant subsidence, resulting in damage to the footpath and associated infrastructure. Having considered a range of engineering options, including hard bank reinforcement, it was recommended to divert the footpath away from the most vulnerable section and allowing more natural river processes to occur. Rob advised that this represented the most practical and cost effective solution. Philip Campagna raised concerns regarding safety on a diverted path running through woodland, particularly after dark. Rob explained that low level bat friendly pathway lighting would be incorporated where appropriate while avoiding ecological impacts. Nick Dove questioned whether the Environment Agency's works elsewhere on the river might have contributed to the erosion problem and expressed concerns regarding future resilience in the face of climate change. Rob explained that these matters had been investigated and discussed extensively with the Environment Agency.	

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	Fiona acknowledged the substantial cost involved but observed that FTC had deliberately increased reserves in recognition of the risks associated with managing a larger landholding and estate. The recommendations were: 1. Approve the project for the diversion and bank re-profiling of the Welshmill path. 2. Appoint Easton Bevins to provide project management, procurement support, Environment Agency liaison and contract administration services. 3. Delegate authority to the Environment Manager to progress design work, commissioning of surveys, regulatory approvals and procurement. 4. Approve a project budget allocation of £70,000 to come from General Reserves Proposed by Andy Jones, seconded by Anne Hills, agreed unanimously.	
2026/105/FC	6. For approval – External Auditor's Conclusion of Audit report for 2025/26 Cllrs considered the External Auditor's Annual Report for 2025/26. Sarah Williams advised that no significant concerns had been identified. The recommendations were: 1. Note the comments of the External Auditor in the Except for section of the Certificate 2. Approve the External Auditor's 2025/26 report Proposed by Andy Jones, seconded by Anne Hills, agreed unanimously.	
2026/106/FC	7. For decision – To reappoint the Internal Auditor Kevin Rose of IAC Audit and Consultancy Ltd as our internal auditor for 2026/27 Sarah Williams presented the report. During discussion, Cllrs considered the importance of periodically reviewing audit arrangements to ensure independence and effectiveness. The recommendation was to approve the reappointment of Kevin Rose, IAC Audit and Consultancy Ltd as our Internal Auditor for 2026/27. Proposed by Mark Dorrington, seconded by Anne Hills, agreed unanimously.	

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2026/107/FC	8. For decision - Amendment to membership of Improvement Advisory Group Cllrs noted the report. The recommendation was to approve Steve Tanner's membership of the Improvement Advisory Group in place of Carla Collenette. Proposed by Mark Dorrington, seconded by Richard Pinnock, agreed unanimously.	
2026/109/FC	The proposal was for the next item to be held in confidential session, therefore members of the public and press were asked to leave. Proposed by Tracey Ashford, seconded by Philip Campagna, agreed unanimously.	
2026/110/FC	9. For decision - To consider a short term loan application from a local community organisation Cllrs noted the report. It was proposed recommendation 1 was amended to reflect the discussion and agreed by majority. Both recommendations were then agreed by majority.	
2026/111/FC	The next meeting will be at 7pm on Wednesday 11 November 2026, at the Frome Town Hall and on Zoom	

The chair closed the public meeting at: 9.00pm

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Chair's Signature and Date: