

**MINUTES OF THE FROME ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
AT THE MERLIN THEATRE
HELD ON 10th APRIL 2013 COMMENCING AT 7.00pm**

IN THE CHAIR:

Cllr Pippa Goldfinger, Mayor of Frome

IN ATTENDANCE:

Frome Town Councillors - E Berry; C Bullen; G Burgess; J Godman; T Golinski; D Hooton; C Hudson; P Macfadyen; D Moore; H Starkie; M Usher

Frome Town Council Officers – Paul Wynne (Town Clerk), Laura Poulton (Administration Officer), Peter Wheelhouse (Economic Development and Regeneration Manager), Jane Llewellyn (Planning and Development Officer), Sarah Hobbs (Community Projects Officer), Jackie Wheeler (Responsible Finance Officer), Simon Woollen (Grounds and Properties Manager), Karen Clements (Town Centre Manager)

Approx. 150 members of the public

WELCOME

The Mayor opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. Cllr Goldfinger informed everyone one of the agenda for the evening and hoped they would stay after the meeting for food prepared by the WI and music from Honk Monster.

MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting held on 18 April 2012 were signed by the Chair as a true record of the meeting.

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE REPORT

Cllr Peter Macfadyen, Chairman of the External Affairs Committee, gave an overview of what the External Affairs Committee had been focused on over the past year.

Cllr Macfadyen explained the ethos of the EAC is to support the community to help itself. This had been done by setting up working parties such as Open Space, Sports and Walking and Cycling. In addition stronger links had been developed with community groups such as F.R.O.G.S and Friends of the River Frome where their expertise has been welcomed.

Cllr Macfadyen presented a slide with the list of grant recipients from 2011/12 to give members of the public a snapshot of how many community groups that the Town Council had been able to support.

In his next slide Cllr Macfadyen stressed that it was not only money that was appointed. At the beginning of the year the Community Projects Officer, Sarah Hobbs was appointed. With her help FTC were providing a structure for Community organisations as well as

informing them where they could apply for funding and how to use it effectively. In addition FTC had been working closely with Greenstrand who provide advice and help with applying for grant funding.

Members of the public were informed of the Community Toilet Scheme that had recently been launched in Frome where businesses allow the use of their toilets on their premises with no charge. This was in response to repeated efforts to persuade MDC to transfer the toilets in the town centre that they had ownership of. The toilet scheme is also twinned with others in Africa which has enabled toilets to be installed into places that have none.

Cllr Macfadyen finished his presentation by saying that a great deal had been achieved and this had been through having the right budget and staff. He welcomed anyone along to the External Affairs Committee meetings which are usually held in the Saxonvale Centre. The next was to be held on 15 May at 7pm.

INTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE REPORT

Unfortunately Cllr Toby Eliot was unable to attend the Annual Town Meeting in person but did send a video of his presentation.

Cllr Eliot's presentation focused on the changes that had happened behind the scenes, mainly staffing and budgets.

Cllr Eliot presented two organisational diagrams showing the staff structure eighteen months ago compared to the most current. He noted the previous structure was hierarchal which was problematic when decisions needed to be made. Using the next diagram Cllr Eliot demonstrated that the new staff structure was much more externally focused.

Cllr Eliot presented two charts showing the budgets and general reserves from eighteen months ago compared to the current year. The chart from eighteen months ago demonstrated that the Council were spending more than their income meaning the general reserves covered the shortfall. Consequently the opportunity to spend this money in the community was reduced. The second chart from the current year showed that the Council were now spending three percent less than before. The majority of the general reserves were allocated for specific projects meaning there was money readily available to spend in the community.

It was noted by Cllr Eliot that a project such as the purchase of the new allotment site was made possible by having these funds available.

FUTURE PLANS

Cllr Mel Usher, Leader of Frome Town Council, gave a presentation on the future aims of the Town Council.

Cllr Usher remarked that these were troubling times with changes to the benefit system, traditional employers in the town struggling and County and District Councils removing services as well as their presence. Investment in the town had often been met with criticism; however there is a need for us to be optimistic and bold. There had been signs of

optimism as crime had reduced, unemployment was under the national average, Frome had an enviable health centre, national publicity for new businesses moving into the area and a thriving and well organised community.

Cllr Usher focused on the upcoming projects the Town Council will firstly be the town centre remodelling project which will help people appreciate the town centre as it should be. He stressed the changes would not stop traffic but make it more pedestrian friendly. The River Corridor Project was finally moving forward after being talked about for decades. The Town Council was on the verge of buying land at Rodden Meadow and were in talks to create a more accessible path from the library and by the canoe club.

The Cheese & Grain was to see a complete revamp of the building. It will mean more open hours, new space for meeting areas and an improved café area.

Finally the Neighbourhood plan was being prepared by FTC. Cllr Usher informed the public that they will be able to approve this at a referendum. The plan would include details of a new self build scheme which will allow more people access to the property ladder and land can be used that wouldn't otherwise get planning permission.

In addition to all these major projects the Town Council had just purchased land at Saxonvale which secured the future of FETE building. The Super Market had been given the go ahead and FTC would be taking ownership of more play spaces and improving the offices at Palmer Street.

Cllr Usher ended his presentation by saying that although we have had our differences with MDC there was no reason why a town this size shouldn't take control of its own destiny.

CIVIC AWARD WINNERS

The Mayor of Frome noted that within her year as Mayor she had had the opportunity to attend some 'weird and wonderful' events. She felt that what stood out for her the most was the variety of what happens in Frome and the dedication of the people who make it happen. For this Annual Town Meeting the Mayor had chosen 7 recipients.

Charles Wood for his work on Vision4Frome, Active Citizens and Active & In Touch.

Dorothy-Anne Bryant for her work with Friends of the River Frome and HopeFrome.

Gary Collinson for his work with Frome Town Football Club and other football clubs in Frome.

Gavin Eddy for his work on the Artisan Market, Flea Market and Super-Market

As well as May Schymzk, Tabby Lawson Coe and Leanne Denwood for their work on 'Oakfield Making a Difference'

Each recipient received a certificate and bunch of flowers in recognition for their contributions to Frome.

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Charles Wood of Vision for Frome asked the Council what was the progress of the Frome Forum. Cllr Mel Usher addressed Charles and provided him with a timeline of correspondence with MDC. Originally Cllr Usher wrote a paper detailing the Frome Forum and submitted it to MDC for their comments but received no response. In October the paper was presented at the Frome Town Council meeting and was approved and again sent to MDC, however no response was provided. In November a meeting was arranged with officers at MDC however this was then cancelled at the last minute. Finally Cllr Usher formally wrote to the Leader and Chief Executive of MDC and so far there had been no response or acknowledgment of receipt of the letter. Cllr Usher welcomed any further suggestions of how to communicate with MDC about the Frome Forum.

A member of the public raised concern about the amount of litter in the town and of her aim to show the film 'Bag It' which encourages towns to become plastic bag free. The Chair informed the public that a new lengthsperson had recently been employed to keep Frome clean throughout the weekends and to help the current lengthsperson who does this during the week. However she did stress that MDC are responsible for street cleaning. Nick Ray of 'Friends of the River Frome' informed members of the public that FORF organise regular litter picks around the river and would welcome anyone to join them.

A lady in the audience thanked Cllrs for the time and effort put in in order to achieve what is now possible and developing in Frome.

A gentleman in the audience asked about the status of the purchase of land for the cycle track. The Town Clerk clarified that this was with regard to the Missing Link project. MDC had recently been asked for their permission to put down a path on the condition that FTC is responsible for its maintenance. Sustrans had been involved in the project and it was felt that other land purchases were no longer necessary.

One member of the public asked what FTC was doing to include the community and consult with them before decisions are taken. The Chair explained that FTC had employed a Community Projects Officer to develop links with Community organisations in Frome. There are regular updates on the FTC Facebook page and there are plans to revamp the website allowing for better communication. Cllr Usher agreed that FTC could never do enough communication. Currently proposals gathered from the Vision for Frome consultation were being worked through and there were plans for more consultations in the future.

May Schymzk addressed the issue of litter and felt that people her age felt uninformed and asked how was this being addressed. Alex Shingler of the Youth Council addressed May's comments and explained that one of the aims of the Youth Council is currently trying to get young people together to tackle problems directly whilst also attempting to provide a better image of young people and change people's perception of them. He encouraged May and anyone else of her age group to become involved in the Youth Council to help tackle issues such as litter.

A gentleman in the audience noted that it was refreshing to come to a meeting like this and be apart of a meeting where there is a can do and positive attitude.

Neil Howlett pointed out that it was not just down to local authorities alone; all residents of Frome needed to be involved.

A member of the public expressed concern about the small part time fire service. She said there was no legal limit you should have per capita and asked how Frome could lobby to increase this. She made a suggestion that this issue be put on an agenda. The Town Clerk thanked her for bringing this issue to their attention and felt it would be best added to an upcoming EAC agenda. Charles Wood informed members of the public that there was currently a consultation from Avon and Somerset Fire service about their future. Comments on the consultation could be made on their website.

A lady in the audience wondered if there was anything being done to encourage independent businesses to move into shops in the town centre. The Chair explained that a branding exercise was being undertaken in order to promote Frome and the town centre remodelling project was moving ahead.

It was asked how people were being informed about how to find out the location of the toilets that are part of the Community Toilet Scheme. The Town Clerk noted that maps that had the toilets marked on them could be picked up at the library and at the FTC offices. The Frome app was close to launching and its promotion would be done throughout the year.

A lady who was a part of a toddler group in Frome asked if there were any more venue spaces available that were suitable for a toddler groups to be held. She suggested that with the improvements to the Cheese & Grain could this be an option for them. A trustee of the Cheese & Grain addressed her question and explained that any group can book the space; however prices had not yet been set. She encouraged her to contact Steve Macarthur, the manager, to receive an estimated quote and advice on the best space for them to use.

CONCLUSION

The Mayor thanked everyone for their participation and ended the meeting with a video, put together by Andrew Stanning, as a visual thank you to the people who make Frome such a great place to live. She also reminded everyone that there would be refreshments by the WI and music from Honk Monster and thanked all those for attending and making it such a lively meeting.

The meeting was closed at 8.35pm.