

## Agenda Item 5

For decision – New post of Assistant Ranger and additional works vehicle

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### Summary

The upcoming devolution deal is likely to include taking on significant extra spaces, and there will be a need to increase ranger capacity to manage this extra land. To upscale in readiness for this change this agenda item proposes to recruit a new post of assistant ranger and the purchase of a new vehicle, a second-hand diesel Toyota Hilux.

While the level of the increase in ranger capacity that will be needed is not yet known, as it is dependent on the nature of the devolution deal that is yet to be confirmed, it is nonetheless already clear that significant extra capacity ranger will be needed to manage many new sites.

As a first step to managing this period of growth, this post will enable the ranger team both to manage existing workload more effectively but also to have the resilience and flexibility needed when transitioning to increase the ranger capacity as part of the devolution deal.

### Background

The ranger team currently consists of 4 rangers, a town centre ranger and lead ranger. The existing ranger workload has increased over time as Frome Town Council have taken on new sites and sought to enhance community involvement in the existing ones, and the team is now at maximum capacity.

The forthcoming devolution deal with Somerset Council is currently being finalised and the exact details are to be confirmed and agreed by Council. However, it is clear that a significant number of new green sites and play areas will be coming to FTC, possibly from as early as 1 April 2025.

The existing ranger team is highly skilled at managing a wide variety of green work tasks to a high level of competency and professionalism. Each member of the ranger team is trained in a range of professional competencies that enables the use of specialist machinery (from ride on mowers and brush cutters to chainsaws and hedge trimmers), as well as working in areas or projects requiring specialist expertise such as in the confined space of the fountain or when laying a hedge. The team is also highly competent in engaging with the community and managing volunteers.

The exact future capacity of the ranger team will vary dependent on the scale and nature of the devolution deal, and this proposal is not aiming to fully meet those updated needs. It is highly likely that more ranger resources will be required once we know for sure the extent of

the open spaces FTC will take on. However, whatever the details of the deal, it is clear that the scale of the ranger operation is set to increase significantly and with it the ranger capacity.

As a first step, to increase ranger capacity for managing the existing workload, as well as to provide the resilience and flexibility needed to manage the transition process when we take on more sites and grow the size of the ranger team, it is proposed to increase the team's capacity by one new post, that of an Assistant Ranger. This was discussed when Cllrs agreed the work programme and staff requirements at January Council.

As the current team is highly qualified, capacity could be significantly enhanced if their work focussed less on those elements of the daily tasks that did not require their full specialist skills. This would include a wide range of tasks from grass cutting on flat sites, to collecting leaves, preparing tools, loading/unloading/inspecting works vehicles, picking up materials, maintaining and transporting equipment to site etc.

An Assistant Ranger post would be suitable for a person with the right aptitude for practical outdoor work as part of a skilled team and working with communities, but who has yet to gain the experience or training to undertake a full ranger role and our intention is to train the postholder accordingly. This post would enhance the capacity of the skilled team while also enabling much greater flexibility of the team to address different tasks across multiple sites. The assistant ranger could also support the town centre ranger when required.

With the creation of this post, we have reviewed our vehicle fleet, and the proposal is for one extra low-emission Toyota Hilux. This one would be a standard twin cab configuration (as opposed to the recently purchased from new custom Arb Hilux truck which included a tipping rear). It can be purchased second hand with low mileage at approximately 1/2 to 2/3 of the new price. As with the existing Hilux, the emissions levels are extremely low, sufficient to be compliant with ULEZ standards. This extra vehicle would continue to meet the vehicle needs if the ranger team expands in the future by one to two further posts.

In addition, we need to replace the yellow transit van that has reached the end of its life (£2k was spent on welding the poor structural condition of the rusting base at the MoT last December). It is proposed that this replacement is a non-diesel electric vehicle as the transit does not need either the torque, or the all-terrain driving of the main ranger vehicles. We are exploring a Ford e-transit that has the range (160 miles), payload (1.5 tonnes) and internal space (similar to existing transit) needed.

These proposals would change the ranger team numbers, and vehicle fleet as follows:

	<b>Current</b>	<b>With proposed changes</b>
<b>People</b>	1 Lead Ranger 4 Rangers 1 Town Centre Ranger	1 Lead Ranger 4 Rangers 1 Town Centre Ranger 1 Assistant ranger
<b>Vehicles</b>	Grillo Ride on Mower Diesel Arb Hilux G4 Electric service vehicle	Grillo Ride on Mower Diesel Arb Hilux Diesel std twin cab Hilux

	G2 (small) electric vehicle Diesel Transit	G4 Electric service vehicle G2 (small) electric vehicle Electric Transit
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### Cost

The gross cost (incl. employer's contributions) of an Assistant Ranger post would be circa £35k - £38k. Funds have already been allocated within the Council approved (January 24) Devolution budget for 2024-25.

The cost of a second hand Hilux would be approx. £21k from the Devolution budget and the cost of the replacement Ford e-Transit would be approx. £25k from the Vehicle & Equipment EMR 327 and revenue budget code 700-7947.

### Recommendations

1. Approve the recruitment of an Assistant Ranger post, as already provided for in the Devolution budget EMR 354
2. Approve the purchase of a second hand Hilux as already provided for in the Devolution budget
3. Approve the replacement of the diesel transit with an e-Transit funded from the revenue budget 700-7947 and EMR 327