



**Okehampton
Town Council**

ANNUAL REPORT 2017-18



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Mayor's Report – Cllr Jan Goffey

A second Mayoral year is very different in some ways from the first one. You're no longer like a deer in the headlights, you have survived the annual calendar of events and now know which ones you are happy to repeat, which you endure and which you are happy to hand over to your Deputy!

The second year, there are familiar faces whom you met already and new faces where people have taken on new roles (they are usually the ones now like deer in the headlights!) You feel more comfortable in the role of Mayor but you also know that there are plenty of people only too willing to yank the choke chain should one be tempted to autocracy!

It is amazing how fast that second year passes, and how suddenly the projects you hoped to see fulfilled get stalled and you realise this will either have to be completed by your successor, or drift back into the ether until another Mayor has a brainwave and seizes their moment. I thought of this only this morning when I came across a press cutting of one of my predecessors, several years ago, who had tried and failed to implement a major change. The problem is, we may have the high profile, the ear of the press and the hearts of the people, but we have limited power to institute change however much we feel it is for the benefit of the town and the surrounding communities.

For any major improvement we must act together, all the parishes around this town hub, the different tiers of local government, and apply pressure to the powers that control whatever decisions need to be taken.

We have seen this be successful as regards the renewal of our Rail service. Finally, National and local government have worked together to get this valuable service back on track. However, applying pressure is a fine art. Too much and people above dig their heels in and send us away empty handed, too little and they ignore us as there are other more important schemes for bigger places.

It is the Goldilocks app. 'It has to be Just Right'. We have to play nicely, but firmly. We have to back our case with facts and statistics, not emotion. Passion is different, you have to show passion to make people realise that this project is one that matters, to you, to your council and to the community!

Okehampton Hospital has been my passionate project these last two years. We lost the battle of the beds but we have not lost the War of Survival. We fight on!

I can't finish without thanking our new Town Clerk Mrs Emma James, with whom this job has become far less onerous and much more pleasurable, she has taken a great weight off my shoulders and her acumen and people skills are a joy to behold! She is a very valuable addition to the town hall staff.

Whoever is Mayor after me, I hope they enjoy their tenure, as I have done. I have met some amazing people, witnessed some amazing achievements and been invited to some amazing events. It is a fascinating role that is constantly evolving as Governments dictate yet more changes to local Government. Even the smallest cog has a role to play and without the smallest cog, the biggest wheel has problems!

Planning Committee – Cllr Tony Leech (Chairman)

As with other years, I have pointed out that The Town Council are only consultees on any planning application that comes in for our town. We send our thoughts and recommendations to the WDBC Planning Department, **who are the main Planning Authority for our area**, and they include our thoughts in their final reports. These reports and recommendations (for and against) are then discussed with the relevant Ward Members (WDBC Councillors). If the planning applications are reasonably straightforward, the Ward Member can agree that they can go through the **Delegated Powers route**. This allows the Planning Officer to negotiate/agree the planning permission with the applicant without it going to the full WDBC Planning Committee. If the WDBC Ward member thinks that the Officers recommendations are border line or go against any of the planning policies, the applications can then be called in to be debated by the full WDBC Planning Committee. However, the Ward Member has to quote specific planning reasons for calling it in. It can't just be that no one likes the idea!!

The WDBC Planning Committee will then make the final decision. If they decline an application the Applicant can then take it to appeal. This is where an independent Inspector looks at the case from both sides and makes his/her decision. This is final and binding with no further appeal from either side. Unfortunately, the Inspectors are based in Bristol, and only look at the facts of the case. It is becoming quite clear that the Inspectors are being told by Central Government that unless the applications are completely against the local and national planning policies, they are to approve them. That is why we all have to make sure that all our ducks are in a row, and that we have only followed the policies as they stand now, otherwise, any developer worth his/her salt, will pull us apart and do whatever they want, wherever they want.

It has become more difficult for all of us since the Government made changes in the planning rules under the NPPF (a national planning framework) and other regulations that allow far more permitted developments to take place without having to come to us at all. Shops can be changed into offices and vice versa for two years with only a notification to the planning authority, and agricultural barns can also be changed into dwellings with very little input from the planners.

We as a Town Council also have to be very careful what we say and how we say it when it comes to planning applications. It is very easy to put your own personal views forward, but if they can be misconstrued, then developers can say that we have 'pre-determined an application', and under these circumstances, the developer may get planning permission by default, so it is imperative that we keep our counsel, and as I have said earlier, look at each and every application on its own merits and within all the policies that we have available to us.

The other main issue we have is that case law is now determining where developments can take place, especially where Local Authorities do not have a Development Plan. West Devon has had a plan in place since 2012 and the new Joint Local Plan should come into force later this year. However, even with these supposedly in place, developers, or more importantly speculative agents; use the case law to basically get planning permission on areas of land that are not in our plans or possibly more importantly where the community wants them. Loopholes in the system are being exploited to the detriment of local needs and requirements. I do wonder what ever happened to the concept of true Localism.

Policy & Resources Committee – Cllr Julie Yelland (Chairman)

Policy & Resources – or P&R as it is affectionately known – is a “standing committee” which is made up of 10 members who are appointed by the Council each year. All meetings are open to the public and there is an opportunity for members of the public to speak or ask questions at the start of each meeting.

P&R is the Committee that awards grants to community organisations that exist to benefit the people of the town. Okehampton has a fantastic network of volunteers who work extremely hard to provide diverse opportunities and services to the town and it is a privilege to be able to play some part in supporting those groups. The process for applying is straightforward and the form, together with some guidance notes, can be found at www.okehampton.gov.uk/grants.php.

P&R is responsible for looking at the Budget, setting the precept and allocating finances accordingly with the final decision being made at a full Council meeting. The Committee manages the finances of the Council and ensures that all expenditure stays within the approved Budget.

P&R makes sure that all the Policies relating to the Council, its' Staff and the Public are reviewed and updated as and when required. The Committee is responsible for the staff with the Town Clerk having day to day responsibility for line management.

This year members of this Committee have had opportunity to receive training on the setting and management of budgets plus carrying out appraisals.

On a final note, we welcomed our new Town Clerk part way through the year and I should like to extend my grateful thanks to all our staff and Committee Members who work so hard on behalf of the Town.

Parks & Open Spaces Committee – Cllr Christine Marsh (Chairman)

I have had the pleasure of being chair of the Parks Committee for another year. This is one of the areas in Okehampton for which we are very lucky to have. It gives a place to hold community events such as the Rotary Fayre, Recreational Sport and a venue for the Fair and Concerts.

The park staff have worked hard to keep the gardens, water feature and playing fields in perfect condition. They continue to plant bulbs, replace shrubs and manage the area so each season we can enjoy walking the paths.

We also manage other areas within the town. The wild flower area at West Bridge, the Heather bed by Waitrose, Skate Park, seating area by the Northfield Road/Crediton Road junction, cutting of the burial ground at All Saints Church and cleaning the bus shelters.

Due to pressures on the Borough Council's budget they are working with us on transferring ownership of some assets that they are unable to maintain. This year we will be taking over the area at the confluence of the two rivers, Fairplace gardens and the public toilets.

The future of our open green spaces within the town centre is looking good. We continue to have a civic pride in our town and will be making the most of these areas.

The Town Council's Responsibilities

Okehampton Town Council is a third tier local council, coming after county and borough levels of local government. Town councils, like parish councils, are limited by legislation as to what they are permitted to do. For example, services such as household waste disposal, housing matters, highway, road and pavement maintenance, street parking and traffic regulation, education and health are provided by higher local authority levels. In planning matters, the town council is a consultee in much the same as a resident is and has no overriding influence on the outcome of a planning authority decision.

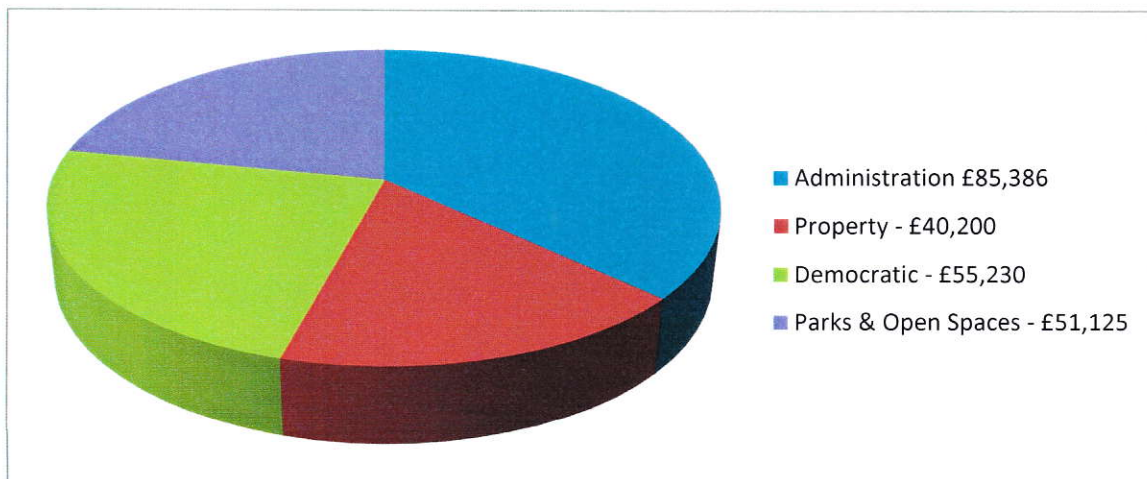
Okehampton Town Council has the statutory power to raise a precept to pay for the services it does provide, or to which it contributes. The Town Council provides a range of social and recreational amenities; the key properties it owns and must maintain are the Town Hall and Charter Hall, Simmons Park with associated play areas and car park, the skate park and BMX track and the newer cemetery area which adjoins the older cemetery. The Council also employs staff needed to undertake its statutory obligations and to support the Council's business and general administration, including the maintenance of Simmons Park.

The Town Council has fourteen elected councillors, comprising of eight members for the North Ward and six for the South Ward. Meetings are held at 7pm on most Monday evenings, this could either be a meeting of the full council or one of its four committees: Policy & Resources, Parks and Open Spaces, Planning or Property. Dates of the meetings, along with the agendas and minutes of these can be found on the council's website www.okehampton.gov.uk.

Elections for councillors are held four yearly, the next being in May 2019 at the same time as the West Devon Borough Council elections. Details of who your councillors are can also be found on the council's website.

Budget for 2018/19

The approved precept for the coming year is £236,941. This sum is made up of the amounts depicted in the chart and a sum of £5,000 to be set-aside and ringfenced to help cushion the blow of the anticipated complete removal of the Council Tax Support Grant from around 2020, which for 2018/19 is £15,079. The increase in the precept demand by Okehampton Town Council from the 2017/18 budget equates to £0.06 p/week on a Band D property.



Grants Awarded - 1st April 2017 to 19th February 2018

On 15th January 2018 the Town Council made the decision to adopt the General Power of Competence which gives it the power to 'do anything that an individual can do', and removes restrictions to whom grants can be awarded. However the Council's Grants Policy has remained the same and clearly sets out the agreed remit as to who can apply for a grant. Information about grants and applications can be found on the website: <http://www.okehampton.gov.uk/grants.php>. The following grants have been awarded in this financial year:

Recipient Organisation	Amount of Grant (£)	Purpose
Okehampton United Ecclesiastical Charity	500	Towards the maintenance of the Clock
Dartmoor Museum Association	3,500	Contribution to the running of the Museum
Museum Tourist Information Point	1,500	Contribution towards the production of leaflets, maps, stock & website
Relate, Exeter & District	500	Grant towards the running of the service
Meldon Viaduct	500	Towards the maintenance and renewal fund
Wren Music	500	Contribution towards the running of weekly summer music sessions
West Devon Community & Voluntary Services	350	Towards the update of the website
Pete's Dragons	300	Grant towards the provision of the service
Okehampton United Charity	300	Contribution towards the management of allotments
Okehampton Community Archives	500	Grant towards the general running costs including rent, insurance, storage boxes, display boards and a banner
Okement Rivers Improvement Group	500	Towards ongoing costs of the maintenance of the rivers
Okehampton Carnival Committee	1000	Grant towards the cost of the 2017 town carnival
Ockment Centre	5000	Towards the costs of running the centre
Okehampton Chamber of Trade	1500	Grant towards the cost of the replacement of Christmas lights
Dartmoor Resonance Music Festival	500	Towards the running of events within Okehampton
Okehampton PADS	500	Contribution towards the purchase of defibrillators for the town
North Dartmoor Search & Rescue Team	500	For the purchase of new search torches
Royal British Legion	50	Contribution for Town Council wreath (Remembrance Day)
Okehampton Fairtrade Group	225	Contribution towards the funding of events held during Fairtrade Fortnight
TNMWD Citizens Advice	4000	Towards the cost of recruiting and training more volunteers
2443 (Okehampton) Squadron ATC	500	Grant towards the purchase of a flight simulator for the cadets to understand the principles of flight
Okehampton District Community Transport Group	2000	Towards the cost of running the service for Okehampton residents

Councillor Attendance at Meetings 2017/18

From 15th May 2017 to 5th February 2018

Councillor	Full Council (11)	Committees				Total	Possible Attendance	Percentage %
		P & R (9)	Planning (13)	Parks (6)	Property (6)			
Cllr Mrs J Carpenter	9	x	x	5	6	20	23	87
Cllr T Cummings	5	2	4	x	x	11	33	33
Cllr Mrs V Cushing	11	9	13	x	x	33	33	100
Cllr Mrs J Goffey	11	9	13	5	6	44	45	98
Cllr Miss C Holt	11	x	x	6	6	23	23	100
Cllr Dr M Ireland	10	x	12	3	x	25	30	83
Cllr A Leech	11	9	13	6	6	45	45	100
Cllr Mrs C Marsh	9	7	6	5	4	31	45	69
Cllr Mrs S Parkins (from 25/09/17)	6	3	5	x	x	14	18	78
Cllr R Rush	7	x	12	4	x	23	30	77
Cllr B Tolley	10	8	x	5	x	23	26	88
Cllr P Vachon	10	9	x	x	6	25	26	96
Cllr D Weekes	11	5	5	3	6	30	45	67
Cllr Mrs J Yelland	10	8	10	5	5	38	45	84

Key

Numbers in () = number of meetings held

P&R = Policy & Resources

X = Not a member of that Committee

Town Council Structure

