



Okehampton
Town Council

ANNUAL REPORT 2018/19



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May 2019 brings the elections and signals the end of the current 4-year term of office for the existing Councillors.

Because of the elections, 'Purdah', a period of time from 21st March up to election day, 2nd May, imposes restrictions on what Councillors can say and do; this includes publishing anything that promotes them ie presenting grant cheques and opening events.

The Mayor's Role – Cllr Janet Carpenter

The Mayor of Okehampton is elected by the Town Council at the Annual Meeting in May each year and is Chairman of the Council.

The Mayor's role during the civic year involves supporting and attending a wide variety of events and organisations throughout the town: Rotary May Fair, Ten Tors Challenge, the Museum of Dartmoor Life, the Friendly Circle, Okehampton Twinning Weekend, Okehampton Show, Okehampton Carnival, Okehampton Primary School, Cadet Forces, Fairtrade Group, Okehampton Excelsior Silver Band concerts, Ocmundtune Creative Arts exhibition and many others.

The Mayor also attends events in other local towns, as a representative of Okehampton Town Council, including South Molton Olde English Fayre, Bideford Regatta and Civic Services in Northam, Launceston and Tavistock.

This Council year the Mayor has attended events marking important anniversaries: Remembrance Day 2018 marked the 100th anniversary of the Armistice in 1918 that signalled the end of World War One. The Mayor also attended the 50th anniversary of the Dartmoor Search and Rescue Service, marked by a reception at County Hall, Exeter.

During the year of office, the Mayor hosts civic events in Okehampton – the Civic Service, supported by the Mayor's Chaplain, Edwardian Evening Carols and the annual Civic Dinner.

The Mayor also has the opportunity to hold events to raise money for a charity of choice, this year's being Cancer Research UK. Through the year the Mayor is assisted by the Mayoress/Consort, the Deputy Mayor, Macebearers and the Mayor's Cadet who is chosen from the Army or Air Cadets on an alternating basis.

Planning Committee – Cllr Tony Leech (Chairman)

As with previous years, Okehampton Town Council's Planning Committee covers quite a few issues throughout the year, but each year seems to throw up new issues, mainly due to Government modelling in the Planning Legislation.

Although we are only consultees when it comes to any planning application, we can, and do comment, but as stated many times, we can only stick to pure planning reasons when considering applications.

It has proved very hard over the last year to use any of the West Devon Borough Council's (WDBC) Planning Policies to challenge or indeed agree to any application, as the present policies have just about all been made unworkable due to the Government making changes in the Planning Legislation. The consequences of this have made the WDBC Core Strategy and five year land supply out of date. Developers have used this to put forward applications that would normally go against already agreed development plans and, if turned down by the Local Authorities, the Inspectors agree the developments on appeal. This type of application has happened with one 50 house development close to Okehampton and quite a few other developments around the Borough. The new Joint Local Plan that should be in full force by the end of spring this year will at least halt this type of unplanned development. That is if the Government do not make even more changes that would undo all the work that has been done to close the loopholes.

We often have applications for work on trees around the town and in the Conservation Area. These applications can vary from completely removing the trees, to tree surgery to make them smaller or indeed safer. The only thing that we can comment on is the individual tree's 'Amenity Value'. This means, if a specific tree or trees are removed or changed, would it affect the overall aesthetics of the area. In a rural area, and with more and more developments coming our way, it is important that we make sure that as many of our trees are protected with Tree Preservation Orders as possible, as the density of housing developments now means that there is no room for many of our native trees to grow and thrive.

Finally, we have been working with Devon County Council (DCC) Highways Department to try to find ways to improve the flow of traffic around the town. DCC Highways carried out a traffic flow survey about a year ago now. The survey was carried out over a 24 hour period just after the 'Beast from the East' deposited a great deal of snow on and around us. We were concerned that this survey would not produce correct data, but were told that if we wanted it carried out again, we would have to pay for it, but the data collected would be collated and a report showing possible changes to the traffic flows would be produced by Autumn 2018. Autumn came and went and we were told that the report would be ready for Spring this year. Although we have asked, we have still not received an actual date for this report to materialise, so watch this space!

Policy & Resources Committee – Cllr Julie Yelland (Chairman)

So ... what exactly does the Policy & Resources Committee do? Firstly, we have the privilege of awarding grants to local community organisations that benefit people who live in Okehampton. We live in a very rural area and have a wonderful network of volunteers who give up their time, energy and skills to provide lots of different opportunities for people to come together. Money is always needed to run any organisation and, by providing grants, the Town Council is thrilled to be able to play some part in supporting those groups. The process for applying is very straightforward and the form, together with some guidance notes, can be found on the Town Council website at www.okehampton.gov.uk/grants.php.

Secondly, we are responsible for scrutinising the Annual Budget and setting the precept with the final decision being made at a full Council meeting. The precept is the amount of money that is paid through the Council Tax to provide the services that the Town Council is responsible for. We also oversee the finances of the Council and monitor to ensure that all expenditure is within the approved budget.

The Committee reviews and approves all the policies relating to the Council, staff and members of the public. It is responsible for recruitment with the Town Clerk having day to day responsibility for staff. We have seen some changes within the team this year due to existing staff retiring or moving away. The new staff members have settled in remarkably well and hit the ground running.

Training is available to members to ensure that they can function effectively as a member of this Committee. The Town Clerk is the "proper officer". What this means is that she ensures all matters that come up for debate are within the remit of Councillors and that all decisions made are legal and acted upon. The Committee itself is made up of 10 members who are appointed by the Council in May of each year. All meetings are held in public and there is always space allowed for on the agenda where members of the public can speak or ask questions at the start of the meeting. Anyone is very welcome to come along – even if it is just to observe and see what actually happens during a Council meeting. Highly recommended if you are thinking of standing for election!

On a final note, I should like to take this opportunity to say a big thank you to all the members of the Committee and staff who are passionate about our beautiful town and work hard to ensure the resources that are available to us are used in the best possible way for the benefit of the people of Okehampton.

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

Simmons Park is a beautiful location in the centre of Okehampton. It is used for many outdoor events throughout the year including the Rotary Annual Fair, the twice-yearly funfair in May and October and various charity fundraising events supporting good causes. OCRA and other sporting clubs use this stunning valley location to hold county and regional events attracting many local people to the venue.

Our Park-keeper of over seventeen years retired last summer and his management and skill helped to create the park we have today. The new Park-keeper, James, is carrying on this work and hoping to continue the development of the park as an attraction and asset for the community.

The whole of the park sits within a conservation area, part of which is Grade II listed. To ensure its continued protection the Council is in the process of reviewing and strengthening its charitable status.

The Town Council's Responsibilities

Okehampton Town Council is a third tier, grass roots, 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 way 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 at All Saints Church. The toilets and garden area at Fairplace, the verge by the bridge at West Street and the grass area behind Lidl are in the process of being transferred from WDBC to the Town Council who will take over responsibility for them in the near future, ensuring that the public toilets at Fairplace remain open.

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. It has been agreed to employ a Horticultural and Landscape Apprentice in the 2019/20 financial year.

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 and 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.

This year the Council has joined social media and now has a Facebook presence where items are posted for information and as a platform to advertise; for example, the apprenticeship vacancy, tenders for the Fairtrade Toilets cleaning contract and events in the Charter Hall or Simmons Park.

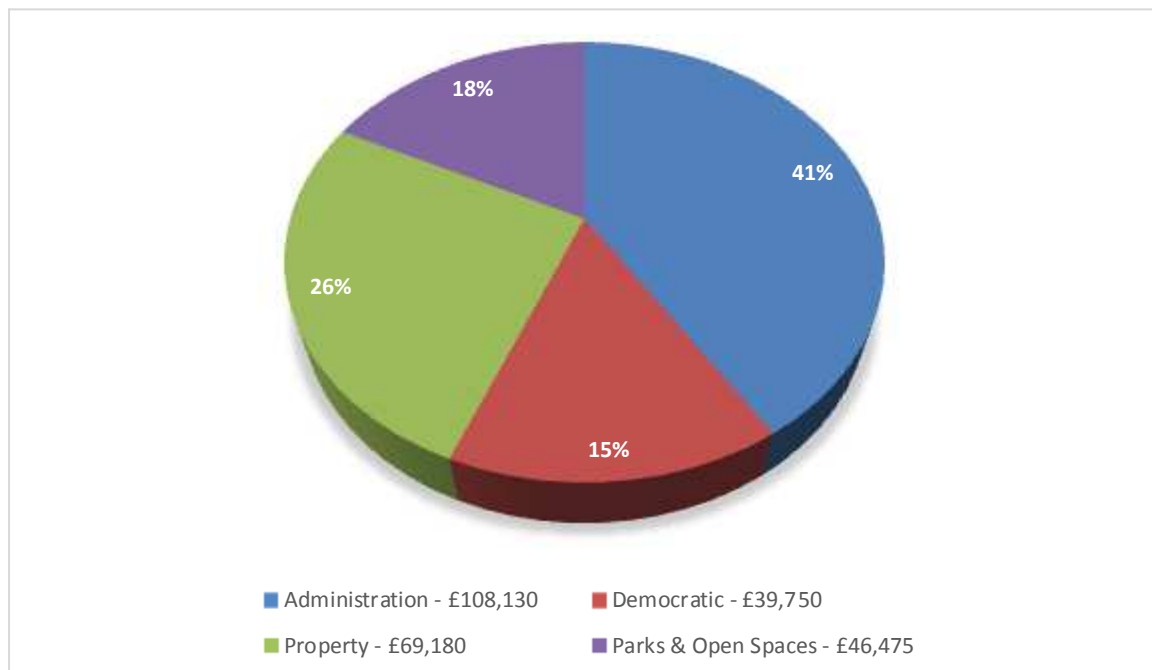
Elections for Councillors are held four yearly, the next being on 2nd May 2019 at the same time as the West Devon Borough Council elections. Details of who your Councillors are can also be found on the Council's website.

Mayor Choosing is undertaken as part of the Council's Annual Meeting which is on Wednesday 15th May, and open to members of the public to attend.

Budget for 2019/20

The approved budget for the coming year is £263,535, and is made up of the precept - £249,753 and the Council Tax Support Grant - £13,782. This sum is made up of the amounts depicted in the following chart. The increase in the precept demand by Okehampton Town Council from the 2018/19 budget equates to £0.12 p/week on a Band D property.

During 2018/19 the budget was hit by the requirement for the heating boiler, being at least 20 years of age and which serves both the Town Hall and Charter Hall, to be replaced at a cost of over £10,000. Prudent financial planning for the 2019/20 budget includes a sum of money to start to build a boiler replacement/repair fund for the future; £2,000 to contribute to a fund started in 2018/19 to help cushion the removal of the Council Tax Support Grant for which 2019/20 is the last financial year of its receipt; £1,500 towards the replacement of the Charter Hall roof; £2,000 for marketing and some funds towards the holding of a celebration in 2020 to mark the 800th Anniversary of the town's Market Charter.



Grants Awarded - 1st April 2018 to 11th February 2019

The Council's Grants Policy 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
Museum of Dartmoor Life	3,500	For continued support and maintenance of the Museum
Museum of Dartmoor Life	1,500	To assist with the tourist information facility running costs
Okehampton Duke of Edinburgh's Award	500	Towards the cost of replacement equipment and insurance
Meldon Viaduct Company Ltd	500	For the maintenance and renewal fund for necessary repairs
Okehampton Community Recreation Association (OCRA)	500	Grant towards the running of Okehampton Sports and Fitness Festival 2018
Friends of Okehampton Library	362.40	Towards the purchase of chairs used in the library and meeting rooms
Okehampton United Ecclesiastical Charity	1,000	Contribution towards the maintenance and upkeep costs of St James' Church clock
2243 (Okehampton) Squadron RAFAC	500	Grant towards the purchase of a gazebo to promote the Cadets at local events and for fundraising activities
Okehampton Carnival Committee	1,000	Towards the cost of running the annual Carnival
Ockment Centre	5,000	Contribution to the cost of running the Centre during the financial year 2018/19
Okehampton Excelsior Silver Band	250	Grant towards the cost of the installation of a new ceiling
Tor Support Services	500	To assist with the provision of counselling sessions directly to children
Okehampton Community Archives	500	Contribution to the cost of overheads to enable the Archive to continue to be opened to the public
Okement Rivers Improvement Group	200	Grant to help with running costs, including insurance, equipment, training and maintenance of seats
Okehampton Chamber of Trade	1,500	Towards the cost of Christmas trees and lights in the town
Devon Young Carers (Westbank)	500	Grant towards the cost of regular trampolining sessions at OCRA, providing respite from exceptional caring responsibilities
Junior Life Skills	300	Contribution towards the costs of the venue, organisation and managing fee for the running of the sessions for all Year 6 children in West Devon
Okehampton United Charities	1,102.84	Towards the cost of the provision of allotments
Okehampton Fairtrade Group	250	To assist in funding events during Fairtrade Fortnight

Councillor Attendance at Meetings 2018/19

From 15th May 2018 to 25th February 2019

Councillor	Full Council (13)	Committees				Total	Possible Attendance	Percentage %
		P & R (14)	Planning (19)	Parks (7)	Property (6)			
Clr Mrs J Carpenter	11	10	13	3	4	41	59	70
Clr T Cummings	5	6	4	X	X	15	46	33
Clr Mrs V Cushing	12	14	18	X	X	44	46	96
Clr Mrs J Goffey	11	13	X	X	6	30	33	91
Clr Miss C Holt	13	X	X	7	6	26	26	100
Clr Dr M Ireland	12	X	16	6	X	34	39	87
Clr A Leech	11	11	17	4	5	48	59	81
Clr Mrs C Marsh	13	12	12	6	6	49	59	83
Clr Mrs S Parkins (resigned 17/12/18)	5	X	6	3	X	14	31	45
Clr R Rush	8	X	15	5	X	28	39	72
Clr B Tolley	12	13	X	7	X	32	34	94
Clr P Vachon	13	14	X	X	6	33	33	100
Clr D Weekes	8	6	11	3	5	33	59	56
Clr Mrs J Yelland	12	13	19	7	6	57	59	97

Key

Numbers in () = number of meetings held

P&R = Policy & Resources

X = Not a member of that Committee

Town Council Structure

