

**Minutes of a meeting of Okehampton Town Council held on
Thursday 11th July at 2.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Okehampton**

Members Present: Councillor J Yelland (Mayor)
 Councillor M Ireland (Deputy Mayor)
 Councillor T Leech (Chairman, Planning)
 Councillor C Marsh (Chairman, Parks)
 Councillor B Tolley (Chairman, Policy & Resources)
 Councillor C Holt
 Councillor J Goffey
 Councillor D Sanger
 Councillor Vachon

In Attendance: Mrs E James (Town Clerk)
 Mr S Mullineaux, WDBC
 1 member of the public

163 Declarations of Interest were declared by Cllrs Leech, Vachon and Yelland, all being Members of WDBC.

164 Apologies for Absence – Cllrs Button, Jessop and Penna

Action

On the proposition of Cllr Goffey, seconded by Cllr Leech, it was **RESOLVED** to suspend Standing Orders to permit Mr S Mullineaux to speak regarding the proposed closure of the Northern Outreach Service and for Members to pose questions.

Mr Mullineaux introduced himself, being the WDBC’s Customer Service Delivery Director. He outlined the background of the proposed closure of the service in Okehampton; during budget discussion in 2018 it was resolved to close the WDBC office in St James’s Street, Okehampton and that WDBC would stop accepting cash and cheques as payment. One of the significant uses of the Okehampton office was for payments to be made. It was further agreed that a service for members of the public would be provided in the Ockment Centre 2 days per week. Changes to the payment systems was followed by a drastic cut in footfall to the offices.

Mr Mullineaux reported that since the closure of St James Street there had been 684 visits to the Ockment Centre by members of the public, including for the following reasons:

- 400 to collect recycling boxes
- 115 queries regarding housing benefit
- 79 enquiries about Council Tax
- 54 in relation to housing

The service was reduced and was currently offered 1 day per week, visits by members of the public reported to be on average 3 per day, the queries from whom are generally referred on to the WDBC Customer Service Centre.

Questions were posed to Mr Mullineaux by Cllrs including;
 Provision made for vulnerable members of the public who are unable to contact or get to the offices in Tavistock – it was advised that home visits can be arranged if there are no other options available. It was asked if a dedicated telephone number avoiding the Call Centre could be provided – this would be seen as preferential treatment being offered

Mr Mullineaux advised that the proposed closure was not down to hire costs of the Ockment Centre as the charge was minimal at £10 p/day, the main costs are people time. It was suggested by Mr Mullineaux that a dedicated WDBC computer could be given to the Town Council along with training to allow Town Council staff to provide members of the public with more information.

Comment was made that the Tavistock office was open 5 days a week from 9am to 5pm and on the closure of the office in Okehampton a continued service for the town was promised by WDBC. The service was not being used because it had not been advertised widely. Mr Mullineaux further reported that the reception office in Tavistock was also being reviewed.
(Mr Mullineaux left the meeting)

On the proposition of Cllr Ireland, seconded by Cllr Leech, it was **RESOLVED** to reinstate Standing Orders permitting the meeting to continue.

165 Northern Outreach Service – Cllrs commented that:

- The number of visits to the Ockment Centre made it worthwhile enough to keep a face to face service in the town
- A physical presence is needed in the area
- WDBC has no visibility in or around the town and because of the lack of advertising of the service, it was inevitable that its use would decline as people don't know it is there
- Okehampton has a growing elderly population who don't have transport or internet access
- WDBC could use a room in the Town Hall for face to face visits with members of the public and WDBC Members could hold surgeries as do the Town Councillors.
- Okehampton Town Council should not be doing the work of WDBC and having access to their computers would increase staff workload; some issues such as homelessness could not be dealt with by Town Council Staff.

On the proposition of Cllr Leech, seconded by Cllr Tolley, it was **RESOLVED** to make the following comment:

That West Devon Borough Council should provide a face of West Devon in Okehampton as it is the 2nd largest town in the Borough.

The meeting was closed by the Mayor at 3.07pm.

Councillor Mrs J Yelland
Mayor