



**Okehampton Town Council**

# **ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20**



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## **Strategic Plan 2019-2023 - Mission Statement**

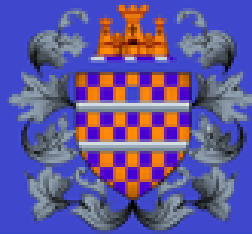
The primary role of Okehampton Town Council is to provide a democratic and representative voice for the community. It will support, and contribute towards, the sustainable environmental, economic and social well-being of the town, having regard to the needs and wishes of the town residents. Okehampton Town Council recognises its obligations to deliver cost-effective quality services and will work with other councils to ensure that the town remains at the heart of the local community.

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## Okehampton Town Council

March 2020

# Did You Know?

### OKEHAMPTON TOWN COUNCIL:

Is responsible for Simmons Park including the play areas, putting and bowling greens, gardens, woodland, meadows, benches, litter bins and virtually everything else within its boundary	In 2019 Simmons Park was awarded the Fields in Trust Much Loved status  The recreation field is available to hire for events	Is working with Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council and members of the public to create a Neighbourhood Plan for Okehampton and the Hamlets
Has rooms for hire including the Charter Hall, with special rates for Saturday Coffee Mornings, the Council Chamber, where Weddings are often held and Committee Room	Consists of 14 Councillors, the last elections having been held in May 2019 Councillor Julie Yelland is the Town Mayor for 2019/20	Now owns Fairplace public toilets and has taken a short-term lease for the public toilets in Market Street
In 2019/20 (April to March) awarded grants to the value of <b>£29,000</b> to community organisations and groups to the benefit of the residents of Okehampton	Has set up a Climate Change Working Group to investigate how the council can reduce its carbon footprint, consider wider issues and is working with other parishes and organisations	Maintains areas including; Clapps Wood Skate Park and BMX Track new Cemetery All Saints Church 2 sets of public toilets Grass verge at West Bridge and its wildflower planting

Looking ahead

Our plans in the year ahead include:

- Progressing with the installation of a CCTV system covering the town centre and Simmons Park
- The creation of a sensory garden at Fairplace
- Improvements to the putting green in Simmons Park to make it more appealing to families

#### OUR BUDGET FOR 2020/21

**£293,702**

Town Council precept request  
£286,702

Equates to an increase from 2019/20 of  
£0.33p p/week on a Band D property

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## **Mayor's Report – Cllr Julie Yelland**

As I reflect on my first year as the Town Mayor, I am delighted to present our Annual Report for 2019/20. Okehampton Town Council is one of three tiers of local government, all of whom have different responsibilities, which can be very confusing for anyone seeking information on a council related issue!



The Office of Mayor is a civic one that is voluntary and does not come with any decision-making powers. The Mayor has the opportunity to stimulate community pride, encourage business and promote the voluntary sector and, during the civic year, the Mayor supports a wide variety of events throughout the town. The Mayor receives invitations to all kinds of events and every invitation is considered equally.

Duties which the Mayor carries out include:

- organising events to raise funds for the Mayor's chosen charities
- acting as host on behalf of the Council at functions organised by the Council
- attending functions within Okehampton and outside the town as a ceremonial representative of the Council
- Chairing the full Council meetings.

Okehampton Town Council is responsible for emptying the street and dog bins within its boundaries; any green spaces and property that are in its ownership and the car park in Simmons Park. It is also a statutory consultee for planning purposes.

The Council is very much aware of the rise in anti-social behaviour in the town centre and has recently approved the installation of CCTV in Simmons Park and the Town Centre. This will assist the Police in bringing a prosecution and act as a deterrent.

Okehampton Town Council took on the ownership of the public toilets in Fairplace and has entered into a short-term lease with WDBC to run the public toilets in Market Street. While Councillors know this will impact on the Council Tax, we are firmly of the view that retaining public toilets is essential for the health and wellbeing of our community and visitors to the town.

As Mayor, I was invited to chair a meeting between Okehampton Town Council; WDBC; DCC and local stakeholders looking at how we can work together to protect and enhance the vitality of our Town Centre. I also attended a workshop that was run by the Devon Estates Lead for NHS Property Services the purpose of which was to ensure that our Hospital building remains in use and fully utilised. While there are many clinics being run out of the hospital, there is space that can be available for community use. This will mean that in the event the CCG decides to re-instate community beds, the building will be available and fit for purpose.

The Town Council set up a Climate Change Working Group whose remit is to review the Council's own customs and practices. We signed up to the Tree Charter and two members were appointed to attend external groups on behalf of the Council such as

the Okehampton Climate Change Group; WDBC & DCC. The group organised a coffee morning which gave an opportunity for the public to present their views and other organisations that have an interest in Climate Change to come together and exchange ideas and contact details!

The Council made responses to consultations and lobbied respective bodies with regard to the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service Delivery options; WDBC in connection with the provision of a face to face service in the Town; DCC regarding the Town Centre Traffic congestion and the Minister of Transport, Prime Minister and our MP urging them to set and announce a date for the re-instatement of a regular passenger service between Okehampton and Exeter as a matter of urgency.

A four-year Strategic Plan has been developed which outlines the Council's six priorities. These are Democracy; Climate Change and Biodiversity; Community; Environment; Economy and Workforce.

The money needed to carry out the functions of the Council is raised through the Council Tax and funded by those who live in the town. As Councillors, we work hard every year to keep the Council Tax as low as possible while providing the best quality local services we can; looking after the property that belongs to the people of Okehampton and fulfilling our duty of care towards our staff.

During my year of Office, I have been writing a blog which is uploaded to the Town Council website every month and put on our Facebook page. The purpose of this is to give those who are interested an insight into the variety of events the Mayor is invited to attend.

Last year, we introduced monthly Town Council Surgeries. This has proved to be successful, so they are continuing plus invitations are extended to elected representatives from WDBC and DCC to attend when they are available. A good selection of Councillors can usually be found at coffee mornings that are held on a Saturday morning in the Charter Hall. There is a Town Council meeting pretty much every Monday evening starting at 7.00pm in the Town Hall. These are open to the public and there is always a place on the agenda for a member of the public to speak right at the start if you so wish. Of course, you are welcome to contact your Councillor directly at any time – all our contact details are on the Town Council website.

On a final note, I should like to express my thanks to everyone who has contributed to the work of Okehampton Town Council this year. A lot of hard work goes on behind the scenes by our staff to ensure Councillors have the information they need to make effective decisions and those same staff then need to implement those decisions effectively. I am extremely grateful to all the Councillors and Staff for their diligence, enthusiasm and commitment to our lovely town.

*Cllr Julie Yelland*

Councillor Julie Yelland  
Town Mayor

## **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 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 provides, or to which it contributes. The town council provides a range of social and recreational amenities; the key properties it owns or are responsible for 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 were transferred from WDBC to the town council in 2019 and who is now responsible for the running and maintenance of them.

In addition, the town council has taken over the running and responsibility of the public toilets and adjoining bus stop in Market Street on a short-term lease basis from WDBC to ensure continuity of service to members of the public; both residents and visitors to the town.

The council employs staff needed to undertake its statutory obligations and to support the council's business and general administration, including the maintenance of Simmons Park. For the first time, in 2019 council employed a Horticultural and Landscape Apprentice.

The town council has fourteen elected councillors, comprising of eight members for the North Ward and six for the South Ward. Elections for town councillors in May 2019 were uncontested and left one vacancy which was filled by co-option in June. Your councillors details can be found on the council's website.

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](http://www.okehampton.gov.uk). The council has a facebook presence where information can also be found.

Annual Mayor Choosing is undertaken as part of the Council's Annual Meeting which is on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> May and open to members of the public to attend.

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

This has been another exciting year for the Parks Committee. James, our Park-keeper, has settled in and has been joined by Neil on a part-time basis. The Council decided to offer an apprenticeship scheme this year and we are happy to welcome George to the team.

After several years of negotiation, we are finally the owners of three



pieces of land. The first is Fairplace Gardens including the public toilets. This seating area will become a sensory space with new exciting planting to replace the old landscaping.

The second area is the confluence of the East and West Okement rivers behind Lidl Supermarket. The viewing platform requires some repairs this year, but it still remains a unique feature within the centre of our town.

The third area is the green space as you enter the town from the West, the verge at West Bridge, and this will be planted again with a lovely display of wildflowers.

After years of a flat, uninteresting putting area by Parklands Leisure Centre, changes are being made. Our park staff will be constructing some new interesting and challenging features to the existing layout. Please take time to visit it and play a game or two!



As well as our biggest asset, Simmons Park, we own Clapps Wood and the skate park area at North Road. All of which we maintain for people to use and enjoy. We are pleased to have StOC, a group of volunteers, working with us this year. Together we will be working in Platts Meadow to improve the natural wildlife and meadow element.

The beautiful recreation area in Simmons Park, which was awarded the Fields in Trust Much Loved status in 2019, is available to hire by charities or organisations for events.

### **Planning Committee – Cllr Tony Leech (Chairman)**

As with previous years, the Okehampton Town Councils Planning Committee covers quite a few issues throughout the year, but each year seems to throw up new issues, mainly due to Government meddling in the Planning Legislation, which they continue to date.

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 difficult over the last few years to use any of the West Devon Borough Councils Planning Policies to challenge or indeed agree to any application, as the policies under the old Core Strategy were made unworkable due to the Government making changes in the Planning Legislation. We now have the Joint Local Plan in place, which should provide us with some firm policies that will allow us to have development where the community wants it, and not development where the Developers believe that they can make the most profit. Neighbourhood Plans are also now even more important, as it is through this avenue that development boundaries are now to be agreed, so it is imperative that the Okehampton and the Hamlets joint plan is completed as swiftly as possible.

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. For example, what we can comment on are the individual trees 'Amenity Value', and what damage losing the tree will do to the ecology of the area. 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 in the future.

Unfortunately, there are now a number of pests and viruses that are affecting our trees, and when Dutch Elms Disease and Ash Dieback are found, then these trees have to be felled and disposed of without any permission being required.

Finally, we are still 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 two years 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, and still are, concerned that this survey would not produce correct data, but we are now about to receive proposals on how best to alter our roads within the town to create a better traffic flow. This will be going out to public consultation. How quickly any agreed works will take is not something we have any control over. It will be as, and when, DCC Highways gets the funding, and when it can be fitted into a programme of works.

### **Policy & Resources (P&R) Committee – Cllr Bob Tolley (Chairman)**

This has been my inaugural year as the Chair of Policy and Resources Committee, having taken up the role in May 2019. I was initially trepidatious, but under the expert tutelage and guidance of our excellent Town Clerk, Emma, and with the generous support of my fellow Councillors I have to say am enjoying the experience more than I expected. I have, being involved at more executive level, also come to appreciate how lucky we are to have such a skilled and dedicated work force to help this Council provide a first-class service to our residents.

The P&R Committee's main role is to supervise the Town Council 'purse strings'; to monitor income and expenditure, to ensure it falls within approved budgets and complies with both Town Council and Government Policies.

It is also responsible, having its finger on the Council's fiscal pulse, for providing advice as to the next year's precept to the Full Town Council for approval. The precept is the amount of money the Town Council thinks it will need for the upcoming year, in order to maintain or improve its services. That amount will then be included, together with the precepts of DCC, WDBC, and all the emergency services, within your council tax bill.

Beside 'bean counting' (Income & Expenditure), it is rewarding to know that set aside within the Council's budget is a modest fund, purely for the benefit of local community groups and organisations. A pleasant aspect of this committee is being able, after proper consideration, to distribute some of these funds to local volunteers and community causes in Okehampton. (A full list of last year's successful organisations can be seen within this report).





The P&R Committee is also responsible for the maintenance and updating of Policies and Standing Orders, such as Staffing, Emergency Plan, Health & Safety, Environmental Threats etc. This is done to keep abreast of the everchanging terms and technologies and new legislation that that may entail. To that end, this year most of the Council's Policies have been reviewed and updated, with a potential of new policies in relation to IT and CCTV.

The council this year has pressed forward with updating its Information Technologies and pursuing its desire to provide CCTV coverage of Okehampton. Although the actual capital for the purchase of these hardware items has been covered by earmarked reserves, the Council will have to make financial allowances for maintenance contracts, software subscriptions and perhaps monitoring.

I would wish to thank my fellow councillors, committee members and staff for all their support throughout this term.

I can assure Okehampton that the Council's coffers are in a sound financial order, policies and procedures are as up to-date as they have ever been, and all our staff second to none.

Just need the weather to get better, but there is no Policy for that.....

### **Property Committee – Cllr Paul Vachon (Chairman)**

The Property Committee is responsible for the buildings owned by the Council. These include the main building containing the offices and Chamber, the Charter Hall and the Market Street buildings in which the Carlton Cinema and rented offices are situated.



The Council also owns the Market Street car park next to the Church Hall, and the toilets at Fairplace – which were transferred to Okehampton Town Council ownership from West Devon Borough Council this last year. Okehampton Town Council are also responsible for the toilets on Market Street which are currently leased from WDBC.

The Charter Hall has been upgraded this last year with the installation of a projector and screen, and refurbishment of the stage floor. A new digital lighting system has replaced the old lighting system. This has made it a better performance venue, which in turn has encouraged a wide range of events.

This year has also seen the installation of a new fire alarm system and the Charter Hall kitchen is being upgraded to full preparation status.



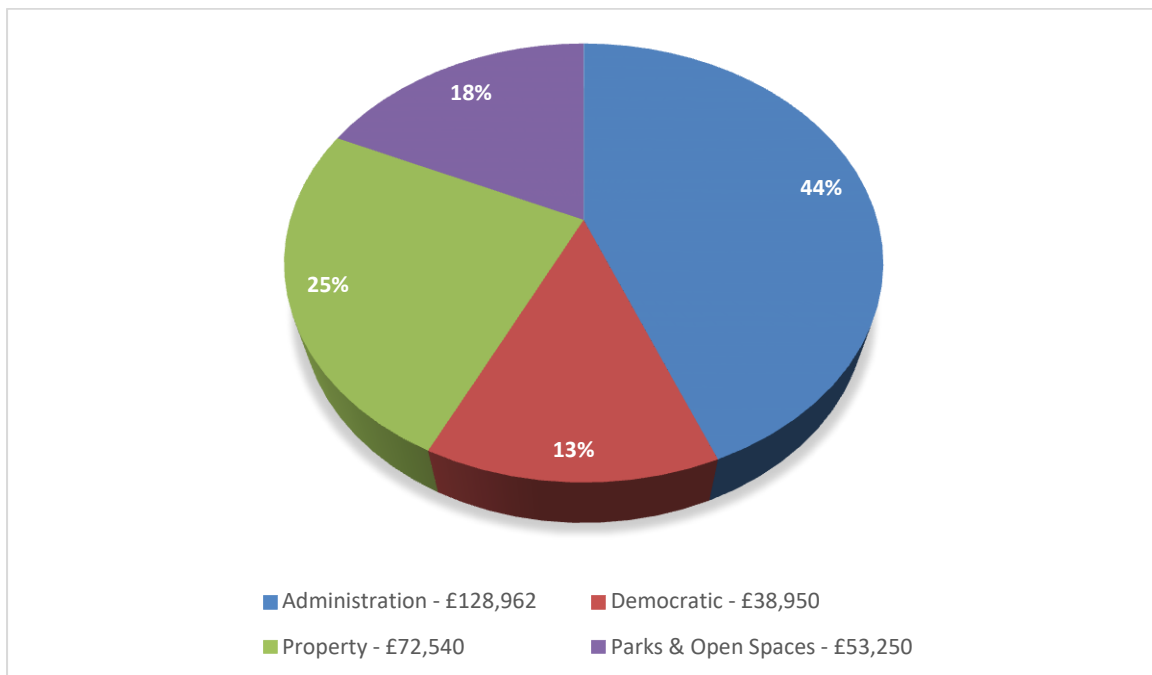
The Charter Hall, Chamber and Committee Room are available for hire throughout the year. The Chamber has been a popular venue for weddings this year – especially as the Registration Office is situated within the Council building. The Charter Hall continues to be a main venue for coffee mornings, supporting local charities and community groups. Further information can be found on the Council's web page.

## **Budget for 2020/21**

The budget for 2020/21 totals £293,702.

Over the past few years local councils in West Devon have received a sum of money, the Council Tax Support Grant (CTSG), from West Devon Borough Council (WDBC) which was passed on from Government. This funding has been withdrawn and WDBC are no longer able to financially support local councils. In anticipation of the loss of these funds, which amounted to £13,782 in 2018/19, the Council has built up an earmarked fund of £7,000 to help cushion the shortfall. The approved precept for the coming year, £286,702 reflects this prudent planning.

The increase in the precept demand by Okehampton Town Council from the 2019/20 budget equates to £0.33 p/week on a Band D property, which helps to put into perspective the actual percentage which is 14.8%. The loss of the CTSG and devolution of public toilets from WDBC has necessitated in a larger than normal increase. Provision and maintenance of a CCTV system covering both the town and Simmons Park is catered for within the budget. A breakdown of the budget can be seen in the following table.



## Grants Awarded - 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020

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:

<b>Recipient Organisation</b>	<b>Amount of Grant (£)</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
Meldon Viaduct Company Ltd	500	Contribution to the Trust's repairs and renewals fund
Museum of Dartmoor Life	3,500	For continued support and maintenance of the Museum
Museum of Dartmoor Life	1,500	To assist with running the tourist information facility
Okehampton Community Archives	500	Towards the purchase of a new photocopier and ink and assistance with rent and ongoing costs
Okement Rivers Improvement Group	500	Grant towards the running costs incorporating insurance, training and purchase of litter pickers, bags and the maintenance of seats
Okehampton Duke of Edinburgh Award	500	Towards the cost of insuring the equipment held
Okehampton District Community Transport Group	2,000	Towards the purchase of a new 15-seater mini-bus
Okehampton United Ecclesiastical Charity	500	To assist with the cost of maintaining the clock on St James' Chapel
Okehampton Armed Forces & Veterans Breakfast Club	500	Grant towards the cost of flyers, flag and banner, website and hosting for the advertising and promoting of the club
RBL Poppy Appeal	50	Donation for wreath for Remembrance Sunday
2443 (Okehampton) Squadron RAF Air Cadets	500	Towards the cost of the purchase of 3 laptops and 8 tablets for use by the Cadets for their training
Everything Okehampton	1,500	Grant towards the provision, insurance, maintenance costs and safety check relating to the Christmas lights
Devon Young Carers (Westbank)	500	To fund the attendance of 3 young carers from the Okehampton area at a weekend residential of the annual Young Carers Festival
Okehampton Fairtrade Group	200	To support a Fairtrade Schools Conference being hosted at Okehampton Primary School
Okehampton Otters Swimming & Lifesaving Club	200	Grant to assist with the cost of Safeguarding training for up to 10 volunteers
OCRA (Okehampton Community Recreation Association)	500	Towards the cost of a Fields in Trust event and the Sport and Fitness Festival in 2020
Citizens Advice TNMWD	4,000	To support the work of the group in Okehampton
Wren Music	400	Grant towards the cost of running the Lantern Procession Event
Okehampton United Charities	5,650	Grant to cover the costs of the provision of allotments, including one-off costs for replacing raised beds
Tor Support Services	500	To assist in the cost of providing counselling sessions for local young people
The Ockment Centre	5,000	Grant to assist with the funding of reception staff salaries

## Councillor Attendance at Meetings 2019/20

From 15<sup>th</sup> May 2019 to 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020

	Full Council (14)	Committees				Total	Possible Attendance	Percentage %
		P & R (11)	Planning (12)	Parks (7)	Property (7)			
Cllr J Yelland (Mayor)	14	11	9	7	6	47	51	92
Cllr M Ireland (Deputy Mayor)	13	X	11	7	X	31	33	94
Cllr G Button	11	10	X	6	X	27	31	87
Cllr J Goffey	12	X	10	X	6	28	33	85
Cllr C Holt	14	X	X	7	7	28	28	100
Cllr P Jessop (co-opted 03.06.19)	9	2	7	4	3	25	27	93
Cllr T Leech	14	10	12	7	7	50	51	98
Cllr C Marsh	13	11	8	7	6	45	51	88
Cllr D Penna	9	X	11	4	X	24	33	73
Cllr D Sanger	11	10	X	X	7	28	32	88
Cllr B Tolley	13	11	10	5	5	44	51	86
Cllr D Travers (co-opted 28.10.19)	4	3	X	X	3	10	12	83
Cllr M Tucker	10	5	3	X	X	18	37	49
Cllr P Vachon (resigned 10.03.20)	13	10	11	5	6	45	49	92

### Key

Numbers in ( ) = number of meetings held

P&R = Policy & Resources

X = Not a member of that Committee

Cllr P Jessop – Member of Property + P & R Committees 24.06.19–30.09.19; Member of Parks and Planning Committees 01.10.19–16.03.2020

## Town Council Structure

