

**Minutes of the Okehampton Town Council Annual Assembly held in the
Charter Hall, Okehampton on Monday 24 March 2014 at 7.00 pm**

Councillors Present: Councillor M Davies (Town Mayor)
Councillor K Ball
Councillor T Cummings
Councillor Mrs J Goffey
Councillor Dr M Ireland
Councillor A Leech
Councillor C Letchford
Councillor Mrs M McDonald
Councillor Mrs C Marsh
Councillor B Stephens
Councillor P Vachon
Councillor D Weekes
Councillor Mrs J Yelland

In Attendance: Mrs J Gillard, Acting Town Clerk
plus 17 members of the public

1. **Welcome** - Councillor M Davies welcomed the public to the meeting.
2. **Apologies for Absence** - There were no apologies for absence presented.
3. **Informal Discussions** - Members of the public took the opportunity to have informal discussions with Councillors around the room, there were no outstanding questions from this session.
4. **Community Group Presentations** - Councillor Davies welcomed various community groups to the meeting who were invited to give presentations about their activities and explain how grants awarded to the groups from Okehampton Town Council had been used.
 - (i) Get Changed Theatre Company - Mr Tony Robinson. The group was founded in 1994, they are a registered charity and their purpose is to work with adults with learning difficulties. They have a weekly programme of activities mainly at the Ockment Centre. Their major project last year resulted in the group staging two performances at the Barnfield Theatre, Exeter. This year they are working with the National Trust at Castle Drogo. The grant of £300 received from Okehampton Town Council has been used for a publicity board for the group. They have purchased two roll-up banners which publicise the work of the group and the Okehampton area. Mr Robinson thanked his volunteers, trustees and management committee whose joint voluntary contribution equates to in excess of £20,000 to the group.
 - (ii) Okehampton and District Community Transport Group - Mrs Pat Sawyer. The group are finding that more and more people are needing wheelchair transport. Grants from the Town Council have enabled them to purchase a laptop for office staff which has enabled them to obtain more grant funding. They have just moved their premises to the Opportunity Okehampton site and an online booking system is being developed to enable users of the group to book journeys online. The most recent grant from the Town Council of £500 has

been used to purchase new office furniture for the new offices. There is to be a national community transport week 6-14 June 2014 and they have arranged for a roadshow promoting this to come to Okehampton on 14 June and this will be located in the Co-op car park.

- (iii) Ocmundtune Creative Arts - Hilary Sharp. The aspiration of the group is to set up an arts centre in Okehampton. Over the weekend of 23/25 May they are holding a range of arts activities at the Ockment Centre. This will include an art exhibition, 3 nights of concerts, 10 bands, a craft fair and 8 different workshops. It is designed to be a lively and fun weekend for all the family. Tickets will be available from the Ockment Centre and funds from the grant from the Council are being used towards the running costs of this weekend.
- (iv) Wren Music - Marilyn Tucker. The group have been in existence for 30 years and work all over the county of Devon, but all their signature projects take place in Okehampton. They hold events for all ages, over 100 families took part in the recent lantern parade in Simmons Park. There is a detailed article in a recent Okehampton Living giving further details of their activities. The grant awarded to the group has been used to fund the organisation of the Baring-Gould Folk Weekend which attracts a large number of people. A new initiative they have introduced is a folk café.

5. Committee Presentations -

- (i) Policy and Resources - Councillor Mrs M McDonald. This Committee has responsibility for staffing and finance. Councillor Mrs McDonald listed various local organisations that had received grants from the Council over the last twelve months. She explained the Council precept had been increased by a small amount this year to cover increasing costs of providing services to the community. She thanked all the Council's staff for their work during the year.
- (ii) Planning - Councillor A Leech. Councillor Leech reminded the public that the Council are consultees only in the planning process and their responses to West Devon Borough Council have to be based purely on planning grounds. The Masterplanning process was completed this year and this now links into the Core Strategy. He was disappointed on the lack of numbers of members of the public that took part in the east of Okehampton Masterplan consultation. He advised a Roman road had been discovered at the Chichacott end of the new developments, this was of national significance and developers now need to redesign their plans to take account of this. This could potentially mean the need to identify more land for building in the future. He thanked the Acting Clerk and Mayor for their work throughout the year.
- (iii) Parks - Councillor Mrs C Marsh. Councillor Mrs Marsh stated the park was a big asset to the town and this year, Queen Elizabeth II status had been obtained which gives it extra protection for the future. There continues to be an ongoing dog fouling problem in the park. There is a lot of continued use of the park eg the Lantern Parade, May Fair, Fair and Circus. She was pleased to advise that the purchase of Clapps Wood was completed during the year. Future developments for the park include moving and upgrading an old red telephone box to the park to create an information point, adjusting the entrance to the College car park to eliminate potential issues with emergency vehicles using the area when activities are taking place. She advised there has been a spate of vandalism recently in the park and that the introduction of CCTV cameras was being progressed. Council is also looking at the possibility of

taking over some small areas of open spaces around the town from West Devon Borough Council. She thanked the Park-keeper and his Assistant for their work over the past twelve months.

- (iv) Property - Councillor Mrs J Goffey. Councillor Mrs Goffey advised the works on the Charter Hall had been completed during the year and that it was now more fit for purpose. There had been several ongoing roof issues with the Council's buildings over the year, but these were now being resolved. The Council Chamber is being used for many weddings and the Council is looking to purchase new furniture for this room as the existing furniture is very heavy and requires several members of staff to enable it to be moved. They are also looking at a hanging system to display paintings etc for public exhibitions. The Charter Hall was used on practically every Saturday during the year, but it would be good to try and secure more weekday bookings.

6. Questions from the Public -

- (i) There were no written questions presented.
- (ii) Questions from the public present.
- Mr D Woolacott - Is the Council doing anything to mark the centenary of World War One?
Councillor Vachon replied the Art Group were co-ordinating activities, the Town Council were planting poppies in open space areas, the Art Group were hoping to put on an exhibition to include details of memorial certificates issued to Okehampton residents, there would be an open-air ceremony in the park.
 - Mr R Flexman - Do we need a neighbourhood plan and will it be a joint plan with Okehampton Hamlets?
Councillor Leech responded there should be one, it is a goal of his and yes it should be joint.
 - Mrs V Cushing - Are the Town Council planning to hold a Question Time for the European Election candidates before the May European Elections?
Councillor Davies responded that the Council had not done anything to facilitate this, he felt it was not their responsibility and that the Council should remain impartial.
 - Mrs M Woolacott - Nine hundred additional houses are being built, where are the residents going to work? How do we keep our businesses and get people to work here?
Councillor Davies responded employment was a problem, there was a need to re-establish the railway link to get people to Okehampton and for the community to work together.
Councillor Ireland responded that the Chamber of Trade were working with a very positive attitude. He felt that some businesses had been lost through the development of technology (online shopping) and the town could be seen as the victim of demographics. He advised that on 10 April there was a public forum in Exeter to discuss rail resilience, he endorsed the Mayor's views that the rail link should be reinstated and he encouraged the public to put their views forward at this forum.
Councillor K Ball advised that the Opportunity Okehampton site would be including small industrial units to aid employment.

- Mrs V Cushing - Is it true that if the rail line was reintroduced, there are no plans for trains to stop at Okehampton?
Councillor K Ball advised this was incorrect and trains would stop at Okehampton.

7. **Conclusion and Thanks** - The Mayor, Councillor M Davies, thanked everyone for attending the Assembly. He stated that Okehampton had got two of the best schools, not only in Devon but a wider area, various sports clubs were doing very well and the community should keep working together for the benefit of Okehampton.

Meeting closed 9.00 pm.

Councillor M Davies
Town Mayor