

Okehampton Town Council

Okehampton Town Council

ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21 (V.2)



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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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Town Hall
Fore Street
Okehampton EX20 1AA**

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www.okehampton.gov.uk

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Okehampton Town Council

March 2021

Did You Know?

OKEHAMPTON TOWN COUNCIL:

Has supported and worked with the community during the COVID19 pandemic to promote wellbeing, shop local and the safe reopening of the high street. Provided £3,000 in COVID19 Grant created from reserves.	Has agreed the installation of a CCTV System covering the town centre and Simmons Park, including mobile cameras which can be relocated as needed to hotspot areas.	Continued to work with members of the public and Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council 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 the Committee Room. Simmons Park recreation field is available to hire for events.	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. The Alms Houses are owned by Simmons Homes.	Maintains areas including; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Clapps Wood ➢ Skate Park and BMX Track ➢ New Cemetery, All Saints Church ➢ Two sets of public toilets ➢ Picnic area behind Lidl ➢ Grass verge at West Bridge and its wildflower planting
In 2020/21 (April to March) awarded grants to the value of £21,142 to community organisations and groups to the benefit of the residents of Okehampton.	Consists of 14 Councillors, the last elections having been held in May 2019. Councillor Julie Yelland is the Town Mayor for a second year.	Invested £5,000 in the Tamar Valley Solar Energy Roof Project to aid the offsetting of its carbon footprint and in support of local green initiatives.

Looking ahead to 2021/22

Our plans in the year ahead include:

- Supporting the community in the aftermath of the pandemic
- Completion of the sensory garden at Fairplace, improvements to the putting green and refurbishment of the Pillbox in Simmons Park which were delayed in 2020/21 due to the pandemic
- Installation of the CCTV System in the town and park, commencing in April 2021
- Bringing the management of the new Cemetery at All Saints Church in-house
- Continuing to promote the reinstatement of the Okehampton to Exeter Rail Passenger Service, confirmed in December 2020 by the Government
- Creation of a long-term vision and plan for Okehampton
- Replacement of the Charter Hall roof, and possibly that of the adjoining building, ensuring the integrity of the buildings for years to come

OUR BUDGET FOR 2021/22

£302,708

Town Council precept request
£295,708

Equates to an increase from 2020/21 of
4.83% - £0.12p p/week on a Band D property

CONTACT

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Mayor's Report – Cllr Julie Yelland

As Town Mayor, I am delighted to present Okehampton Town Council's Annual Report for 2020/2021. I think it is fair to say that it has been an incredibly difficult year for everyone and I am very grateful to our staff who have risen to the challenges that have been before them and continued to deliver a high standard of services to the people of Okehampton.



This has been my second year as Mayor, and it has been incomparable to last year. This year we have all been living our lives constantly mindful of social distancing and being limited as to how and when we can meet up and for what reasons which has resulted in huge changes in the way we interact with one another. There is a strong community spirit within the town which is reflected in the events that traditionally occur throughout the year and are run by dedicated teams of volunteers. In a typical year, as Mayor, I would have received many and varied invitations where I would have been promoting Okehampton and all it has to offer. One of the roles of the Town Mayor is to stimulate community pride, encourage business and promote the voluntary sector and this has needed to be done predominantly through the power of social media this year.

The Council was very quick to adapt with our staff working from home and online meetings being established as soon as the legislation allowed for it. The Council has been pro-active in supporting and working with the community during the pandemic and was successful in obtaining a small grant that enabled the town centre to be promoted through an advertising campaign and by encouraging people to shop locally and safely. The Council set aside a sum of money from its reserves early in the pandemic to offer financial assistance to residents with referrals being able to be made by Citizens Advice or the Covid-19 Support Group. There is a comprehensive CCTV system which is being installed in the town centre and Simmons Park and should serve to reduce anti-social behaviour. The Council has continued to support the sterling work that is being done by residents of both the Town and the Hamlets to produce a Neighbourhood Plan which should be ready to go out to public consultation in the not-too-distant future. The Council has a four-year Strategic Plan which has the golden thread of a robust approach to climate change running through it and includes off-setting its carbon footprint and supporting green initiatives. To this end, the Council has invested in the Tamar Valley Solar Energy Roof Project which is run by the Tamar Energy Community.

We continued to offer Councillor Surgeries – albeit they had to be held remotely. Members of the public have always been able to attend and speak at the start of any of the Council meetings and that hasn't changed. As ever, Councillors are available at the end of the phone; for an online meeting or by email with contact details being found on the Town Council website.

Of course, the fabulous good news story in the midst of all this is the confirmation that a regular passenger train service between Okehampton and Exeter will be re-instated. It has been a long battle and an enormous amount of work has been going on over many years to get to the stage we have. The benefits to Okehampton and the wider area in terms of offering sustainable public transport; the vital regeneration of our local economy and the tourist attraction is immeasurable. Network Rail are

working on the line to make it ready and the Town Council will continue to lobby Devon County Council to build the Parkway Station on the eastern edge of the town.

I am very proud of the community that we live in and extremely grateful to all those who have stepped up to offer help and support to residents who aren't able to go out due to the pandemic and this is still ongoing. Many have discovered the benefits of volunteering for the first time and I sincerely hope that those who can do so, will continue to offer their time and energy as and when we get back to our new normal. Our well-established voluntary sector will welcome you with open arms I am sure!

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 the Town Clerk to ensure Councillors have the information they need to make strategic decisions and our 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

Statutory legislation was changed during the spring of 2020 allowing council meetings to be held virtually and these have continued to be held at 7pm on most Monday evenings, this could either be a meeting of the full council or one of its four committees. Dates of the meetings, along with the agendas and minutes of these can be found on the council's website 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 being held virtually on Wednesday 5th May 2021.

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 were last held in May 2019. Your councillor's details can be found on the council's website.

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. 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. Market Street public toilets are leased from WDBC on a short-term basis.

The newest Cemetery area at All Saints Church was purchased by Okehampton Town Council in 2004 and since that time has been managed by the Northmoor Team Ministry. Management of the Cemetery is being brought in-house from 1st April 2021 and will be run by the town council under the Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977.

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. In 2019, for the first time the council employed a Horticultural and Landscape Apprentice with the aim of giving back to the community by providing a person the opportunity to learn, develop and establish a career path. The apprenticeship is coming to an end and the apprentice, George, is to be congratulated on his achievements.

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

There have been many challenges for the park staff this year which include of course the pandemic which not only meant that they were unable to work fully for several weeks during the first lockdown but has impacted on the projects that were planned to take place during the year.



Anti-social behaviour has sadly been a problem with damage caused, including to the play equipment, and aggressive actions toward the staff who have been trying to maintain the gardens to the high standard we all expect.

James, the Park-Keeper, Neil and George have been working tirelessly to catch up with the many maintenance jobs that were put on hold, like footpath repairs and painting, and the creation of a sensory garden in Fairplace is not as far advanced as they would like. However, the much awaited and refurbished Telephone Box is now in place and almost ready for use as an information point.



We are all looking forward to a year where you will see many slight changes and additions to the park. The restoration to the WWII Pillbox, just inside the park gates; improvements to the putting area which will include bunkers to catch you out; noticeboards to inform you of the flora and fauna; nature trails for families to explore and special events to encourage people to enjoy the beautiful park.

Planning Committee – Cllr Tony Leech (Chairman)

Okehampton Town Council's Planning Committee continues to cover quite a few issues throughout the year. The main difference to previous years is that the meetings are now all virtual ones. Each month, **as a consultee only**, we review any new planning applications that are relevant to the town, and along with the Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council, any of the larger projects that are now coming

forward in Stockley Hamlet to the east of the town. Each and every application has to be looked at individually, and we have a 'crib sheet' available for all members to use that shows us what we can and cannot comment on. We also have to base our final conclusions on **Planning Policy only**, and not as a kneejerk reaction to comments from others.

As consultees, 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. The Officers (under delegated powers) or the WDBC Planning Committee will then make the final decisions. Should 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. We, as Town Councillors, 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 our 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 council, and as I have said earlier, look at each and every application on its own merit and within all the policies that we have available to us.

The future: Now that the Joint Local Plan (JLP) is in place, and when we can finally agree a Neighbourhood Plan for our area, we should be in a better position to control what and where any future developments are built. There are, however, some concerns about what the present Government intends to do, as they are looking to change all the Planning rules, which could have an effect on how decisions are made. Unfortunately, Governments have made changes to the planning rules a lot over recent years, and what is called 'Permitted Development', which allows people to carry out works to their properties without Planning Consent, has made it harder for Local Councils to be involved.

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

Well, what a difference a year makes. My report last year had been intended for a Town Assembly that, due to Covid, never happened. Here I am again writing another with still the prospect of not being able to hold a normal Town Assembly.

I've met with very few Councillors face to face, in formal circumstances, over the last 12 months and certainly none of the new co-opted members.

All our meetings this year have been virtual, on Zoom. Monday nights have become a bit of a routine now; pop a shirt and tie on, over the shorts and flip flops, make a cup of tea and nip upstairs with a minute to spare. Fire up the computer and you're faced with a remake of the old TV programme Celebrity Squares, but with perhaps less production value. I've seen box rooms, ceilings, bookcases and mansions. I've seen tops of heads, cats and when we stood to remember a former colleague, a screen full of bellies. I'm also beginning to think we have a new American member, Councillor Huron Moot!

In all seriousness, my colleagues and our staff have embraced and utilised the technology brilliantly to overcome the difficulties imposed by this awful pandemic and in doing so managed the town in its usual efficient manner.

I am particularly appreciative of the Clerk and our staff who have, though furlough, home working, and lockdown rules (playparks open, playparks closed) managed to continue the smooth running of the Council and its assets on behalf of the community, during what has been a particularly busy administrative year.

This year has seen, amongst other things, the successful transference of ownership of the Fairplace toilets, the taking on of the lease of the Market Street loos, the hard work of learning to run a cemetery for its management transfer from Church to Council by 1st April and all but completing the longstanding CCTV project.

For those of you unaware, the P&R Committee's main role is to supervise the Town Council finances, to monitor income and expenditure, to ensure it falls within approved budgets and complies with both Town Council and Government Policies. The Committee is also responsible for the maintenance and updating of Policies and Standing Orders, ranging from annual Audits to Waste Management. This is done to keep abreast of the everchanging terms and technologies and new legislation that that may entail. For instance, we will be advising on various new policies in relation to our new cemetery management role. In the next financial year all aspects of the Councils insurances will come under the P&R remit.

We also have some input in the preparation of the towns precept which I am aware will rise this year by more than we all would have liked. The reduction in the town's council tax base, that is the estimate of the number of households available to pay, and the ending of the Council Tax Support Grant, has meant we would have had to raise the precept anyway just to stay where we were. On top of that we appreciated the public's wish to retain the public toilets in the town and the need to ensure the safety and security of both residents and our staff with the long-awaited CCTV project coming to fruition. All these things arrived in the middle of a pandemic where our own income has been restricted. A perfect storm a fellow councillor commented. I can assure everyone that in setting the precept every aspect of our finances was reviewed, budgets shaved and aspirations lowered to keep costs down. We also put monies from an earmarked fund into the pot to reduce the bill.

Normally the most gratifying role of the P&R Committee is the pleasant duty of being able, after proper consideration, to distribute some of our grant funds to local volunteers and community causes in Okehampton. (A full list of the successful organisations can be seen within this report).

Last year's fund was distributed in full. However, due to the pandemic, this year's fund still holds monies, but by the end of the financial year we hope to have provided a few more grants. The Council has decided that any funds not used in the 2020/21 grant fund, will be carried forward and included with 2021/22 grant funding. So, when we go into 'open-up', (not quite sure what the opposite of lock-down is) there will be greater opportunities for grants to charitable groups and local organisations to celebrate the recovery.

I would wish again to thank my fellow councillors, committee members and staff for all their hard work and support throughout this very difficult term, and remember if we do end up having to have a virtual Town Assembly this year, give me a shout and I'll show you my flip-flops.

Property Committee – Cllr Jan Goffey (Chairman)

The Property Committee is responsible for the buildings owned by the Council. These include the Town Hall 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 parking spaces 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.



Sadly, this year we have had very few events in the Charter Hall and/or the Council Chamber so our income has been severely curtailed.

The Charter Hall, Council Chamber and Committee Room will be available for hire as soon as it is allowed again. We hope the Chamber will again be a popular venue for weddings especially as the Registration Office is situated within the Council building. We also hope the Charter Hall continues to be a main venue for coffee mornings, supporting local charities and community groups. However please note that in the next 12 months there will be urgent work carried out on the roof of the Charter Hall so bookings will again have to be postponed.

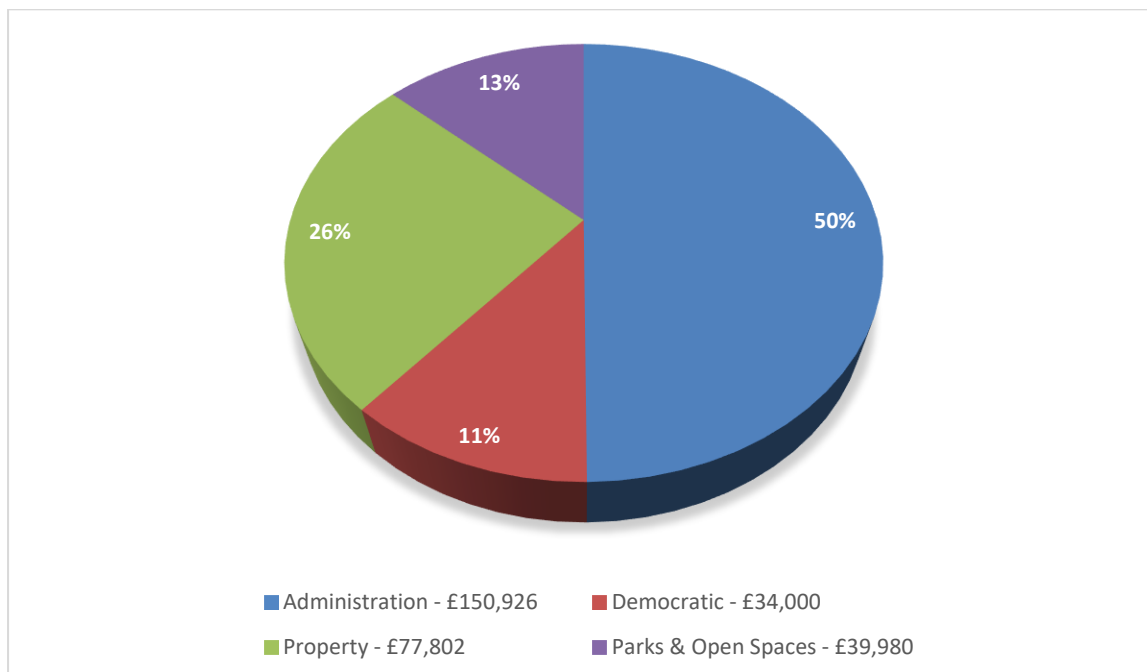
Budget for 2021/22

Financially 2020/21 was challenging for budgets as well as most other aspects of life. The Charter Hall and other facilities have been closed for the majority of the year to all but weddings, when permitted, and NHS Blood Donation sessions. Parking enforcement was paused during the first lockdown and the reduction of footfall has impacted on this stream of income as well.

The budget for 2021/22 totals £295,708.

The increase in the precept demand by Okehampton Town Council from the 2020/21 budget equates to £0.12 p/week on a Band D property, which helps to put into perspective the actual percentage which is 4.83%. In order to keep any necessary increase to a minimum a task and finish group, whose aim was to review income and expenditure, was created and recommendations were incorporated into the budget for 2021/22. 2021 will bring the long-awaited installation of a CCTV system covering both the town and Simmons Park and on which work is beginning in April 2021. Funding for this is largely from previously earmarked funds and grant funding is being applied for to assist with the costs. The replacement of the Charter Hall roof and possibly associated buildings is also planned.

A breakdown of the budget can be seen in the following chart. The chart includes the figures for each Committee which amount to £302,708. An earmarked reserved sum of £7,000 that was put aside to help offset the loss of the Council Tax Support Grant has been added into the budget to reduce the precept requirement to £295,708.



Grants Awarded - 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021

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
Ockment Centre Work Club	497	For the purchase of a laptop for the use of those attending the work club
Okehampton Parkrun	500	Towards the start-up fee
Devon Development Education	350	Towards the cost of the purchase of exhibition banners and publicity materials for events in Okehampton
Museum of Dartmoor Life	3,500	Towards the maintenance and running costs of the museum
Museum – Tourist Information Point	1,500	To support and assist with the costs of the provision of the facility
Meldon Viaduct	500	Towards the Trusts repairs and renewals fund for 2020/21
Okehampton Carnival Committee	1,000	Towards the running of the carnival, including insurance
Everything Okehampton	1,000	Towards the cost of the Christmas lights
Okehampton District Transport Group	2,000	To support the groups recovery from the situation caused by the COVID19 pandemic
RBL Poppy Appeal	50	Donation for Remembrance Sunday wreath
Okehampton United Ecclesiastical Charity	500	Towards the maintenance costs of the Town Clock
Okehampton Duke of Edinburgh Open Group	500	Towards the cost of insurance, equipment repair and maintenance, and training costs
Okehampton United Charities	2,175	Towards the running and maintenance costs of the allotments
Okehampton Community Archives	400	Towards the costs of the overheads including insurance and heating

Okehampton Rivers Improvement Group	170	To cover the groups insurance costs
Tor Support Services	500	To assist towards the provision of counselling services for children and young people
Ockment Centre	5,000	To assist with reception staffing costs
Wren Music	500	Towards the costs of music leader fees to facilitate of a free singing group
Okehampton Community Recreation Association	500	Towards supervised sport and activity for as part of the TES Tor Project, development of volunteer leaders and a family event in the park in the summer

The Council created a COVID19 grant fund from its reserves for 2020/21, the purpose of which was to support the running cost of groups and organisations providing COVID support and to assist individual persons severely financially impacted by the pandemic and who had been referred directly to the Council as set out in the COVID19 Grant Policy which can be found on the website <http://www.okehampton.gov.uk/grants.php>. The following grants have been awarded in this financial year:

Recipient	Amount of Grant (£)	Purpose
Okehampton COVID Sewing Group	15	For the provision of PPE items (further funding provided through a grant received by the Council)
Entertainingly Different	500	Performing to different groups who were affected by the pandemic and the provision of flowers
Referral from Citizens Advice	50	Gas and Electricity assistance

Councillor Attendance at Meetings 2020/21

From 11th May 2020 to 8th March 2021

	Full Council (13)	Committees				Total	Possible Attendance	Percentage %
		P & R (12)	Planning (17)	Parks (5)	Property (4)			
Cllr J Yelland	12	11	16	4	4	47	51	92.2
Cllr J Goffey	13	12	16	5	4	50	51	98
Cllr A Leech	13	12	17	5	4	51	51	100
Cllr C Marsh	11	11	13	5	4	44	51	86.3
Cllr B Tolley	13	12	17	5	4	51	51	100
Cllr G Button	11	11	X	1	x	23	30	76.7
Cllr C Holt	10	X	X	5	4	19	22	86.3
Cllr M Ireland	11	X	15	3	X	29	35	82.9
Cllr P Jessop	13	X	16	5	X	34	35	97.1
Cllr D Penna (Resigned 12/9/20)	5	X	4	0	X	9	11	81.8
Cllr D Sanger	13	11	X	X	4	28	29	96.6
Cllr D Travers	11	9	X	X	2	22	29	75.9
Cllr M Tucker (Resigned 27/7/20)	3	2	2	X	X	7	8	87.5
Cllr A Wood (Co Opted 30/7/20)	9	X	10	X	3	22	22	100
Cllr B Matravers (Co Opted 30/11/20)	3	3	4	X	X	10	10	100
Cllr T Abbots (Co Opted 30/11/20)	3	X	3	2	X	8	9	88.9

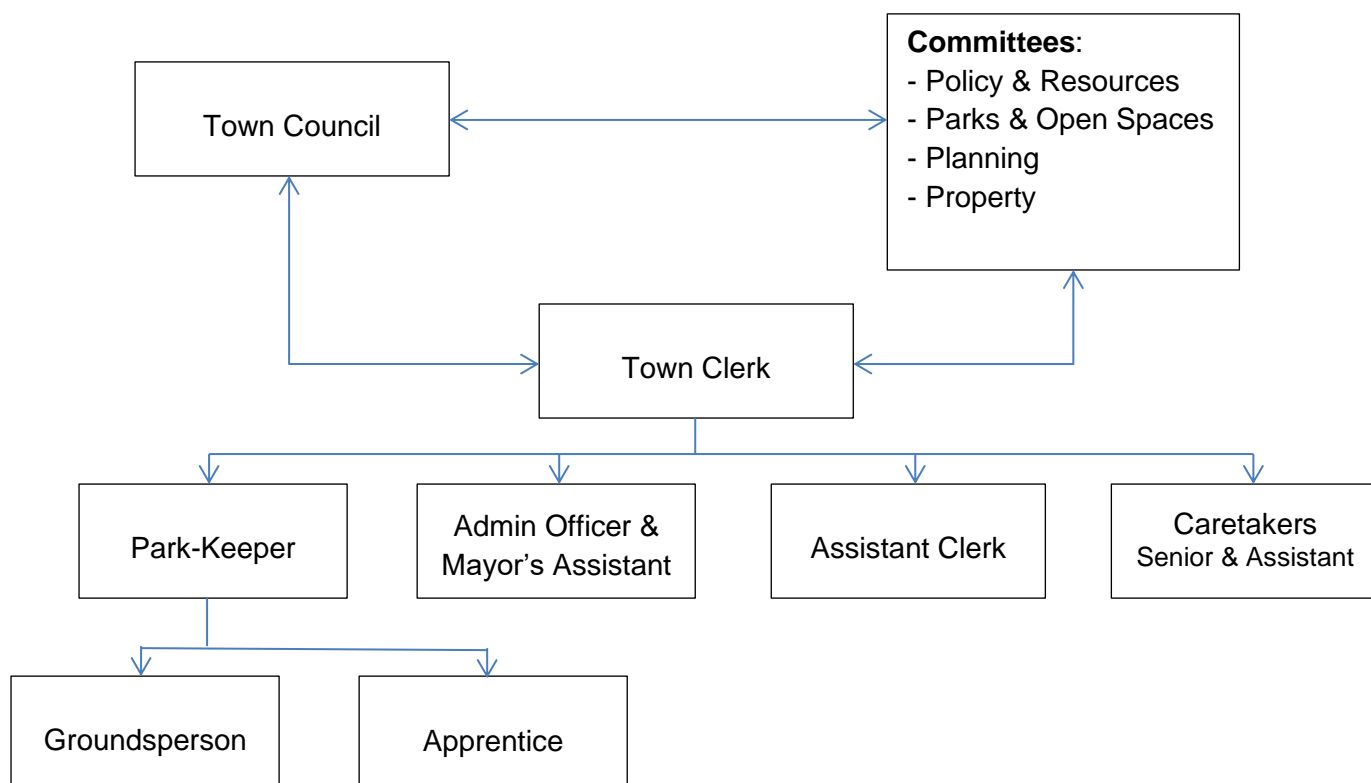
Key

Numbers in () = number of meetings held

P&R = Policy & Resources

X = Not a member of that Committee

Town Council Structure



Civic Service – September 2019