

Okehampton Town Council

# ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

Mayor's Civic Dinner  
March 2022



Okehampton Show  
August 2021

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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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## **Mayor's Report – Cllr Bob Tolley**

Firstly, as I look back on my Mayoral year, can I send my thoughts and best wishes to those people who have suffered in any way as a result of the Covid pandemic and to those who may still be struggling. We will, within the legislative restrictions of the Town Council, continue to do everything we can, or indeed help those who better can, to assist where help is needed. Stay strong.

I am honoured to introduce our Annual Report for 2021/22, and in doing so can I express my thanks to everyone who has contributed to the work of Okehampton Town Council this year. Our Councillors for their work hard, enthusiasm, commitment and wise counsel, on a voluntary basis, not only at Full Council Meetings, but on Committees, Working Groups, and as Town Representatives on other groups, is very much appreciated.

Can I also praise our staff, whose hard work in the background, making sure we have the correct information, implementing our resolutions and generally running the day-to-day administration of the council's responsibilities, is second to none.

My Mayoral year started in 'lockdown' with my investiture ceremony being conducted on zoom with me the sole occupant of the Council chamber but went on to be the busiest and best year of my council career to-date.

One of the main roles of the Mayor, the Civic head of Okehampton, is to engender community cohesion and pride, to encourage business and promote the voluntary sector. To that end I have made a point of accepting, where possible, every invitation made. I feel by attending, the profile of the event, charity or organisation is heightened and encourages interest from potential funders and the press.

Another role is to act as the formal host for any functions organised by the council and to represent Okehampton at civic events in neighbouring authorities. I have also organised and hosted events to raise money for my chosen charity, Dream-A-Way.

Aside from these duties, I chair the Full Council Meetings, and along with the job comes membership and ex-officio roles of various local charities and community groups.

This year, to the disappointment of others I suspect, I have attended those events that were postponed due to Covid and normally come around every five years. I was therefore lucky enough to represent the town at Torrington's Mayflower 400 firework display which should have been last year. Also postponed from last year was Okehampton Commoners Beating the Bounds event, which again I was lucky to have participated in this year.

By far the biggest event this year was the opening of the Dartmoor Line and the subsequent benefits and publicity that brought to Okehampton. I do appreciate how fortunate I was to be the Mayor at its opening, but must credit fellow and former councillors, in particularly Cllr Dr Michael Ireland, and local railway groups for their hard work over the preceding 10 years that made this achievement possible.

As a Town Council we have taken on the management of our cemetery this year and have continued managing the two sets of public toilets giving us a better idea as to

costs and benefits. The CCTV is now up and running and is already proving its worth with regard to antisocial behaviour.

Our newsletter which tells everyone what we have done, what we plan to do, contact details and Council diary, has been published every month for most of the year and which, I think, will help to bring council and community even closer together.

On the subject of community ties, our most recent resolution is to consult the town residents with regard to our town boundary to give you a democratic say as to whether you are happy with the status quo or think it should change.

Can I once again thank everyone, both council and community for their support throughout this year and wish everyone the very best for the next 12 months, and please, stay safe.

### **The Town Council's Responsibilities**

Statutory legislation that was changed temporarily in 2020 allowing council meetings to be held virtually expired in May 2021 and since then the council has legally had to revert to face-to-face meetings. These have been held in the Charter Hall instead of the Council Chamber which allows plenty of room for social distancing. Meetings generally commence at 7pm and are held 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](http://www.okehampton.gov.uk). The council has a Facebook presence where information can also be found.

To promote engagement with residents the council started producing a Newsletter in May 2021 and these are published at least bi-monthly. They are available on the website, Facebook page, and can be emailed directly to recipients, details of how to sign up are available on the website. Hard copies are available in the Town Hall and other places in the town including the Library and Ockment Centre.

Mayor Choosing is undertaken as part of the Council's Annual Meeting which is being held on Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2022, in either the Council Chamber or Charter Hall – the location has yet to be confirmed.

The 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 and are due to be held again in May 2023. 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 public toilets and garden area at Fairplace, the verge by the bridge in 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.

The newest Cemetery area at All Saints Church was purchased by Okehampton Town Council in 2004. From the time of the first burial until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 it was managed by the Northmoor Team Ministry. Management of the Cemetery was brought in-house from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 and is now 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. Amongst its employees is a Horticultural Apprentice.

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

The biggest unforeseen cost on our Parks budget this year has been the dreaded Ash Dieback disease which has affected the trees in Clapps Wood. There are also some in Simmons Park that are affected, but the removal of these will not have such an impact as in Clapps Wood. The woodland has been replanted with around 100 small trees; a lovely mix of native species which include Silver Birch, Sweet Chestnut, Rowan, Oak, Hazel, Hornbeam, Willow, Beech and Oak. Clapps Wood will still remain a natural wildlife area which people can walk through.

The Sensory Garden at Fairplace is maturing and will have some new plants arriving for the spring and summer. This area has been the brainchild of our Park-Keeper, James. A new leaflet explaining what is planted there and showcasing Simmons Park has been published and is available from the Town Hall.

There is work ongoing to refurbish the benches and seating around the town and maintenance of the wildflower areas continues. There will be a new area of wildflower planting at West Bridge to look out for this year.

The telephone box in Simmons Park is now in situ and being used as a book swap and information point. The first phase of the CCTV scheme has been installed, is up and running and covers areas of the park as well as the town.

With summer approaching it will be a chance for all to enjoy the forthcoming events in Simmons Park, be it charity fairs, celebrations or sporting activities.

We are blessed with this beautiful park close to the town centre and I would like to thank all the Park staff; James, Neil and our new apprentice Jacob for their hard work in maintaining the park and other areas to the high standard that has become the norm.

## **Planning Committee – Cllr Michael Ireland (Chairman), Cllr Paul Jessop (Vice-Chairman)**

I have been Chair of the Planning Committee for a year and I wish to acknowledge the support I have received from the Vice-Chair and the Assistant Clerk. The council are consultees on planning applications that are received in the town. The committee discusses each application and sends its response to WDBC. Applications can be only determined on set material considerations and cannot consider other factors, for example loss of private view or speculation over future use.

The Planning Committee takes into account the natural environment in which the development will take place. For example, we have suggested 'hedgehog highways' be installed between gardens. Ancient hedge rows have been throughfares for wildlife and these need to be maintained. Ideally wildlife corridors should be provided before building work commences.

Large scale developments just outside the town council's boundary are discussed and considered by the committee. For example, the recent issue that was brought to the notice of the Chair, was the loss of wildlife habitat on a large scale in the Hamlets on the North East side of the town. The developers and the Borough Council have put forward measures to mitigate the impact on wildlife.

I have worked with the Assistant Clerk over a two-year period as consultee to the Dartmoor National Park Authority in relation to the Dartmoor Local Plan. We are pleased to say that the plan has now been adopted. As Chairman I gave evidence to the inspector for this inquiry.

This year has been unprecedented through the impact of ash-dieback in the town making it necessary for the Planning Committee to agree to the unfortunate felling of trees.

The Planning Committee are working towards a Memorandum of Understanding with WDBC and has suggested a number of amendments which we are hoping will be adopted.

### **Cllr Ireland (Chairman)**

Planning is both rewarding and frustrating I find. As the Town Council's role is only on a consultancy basis we can only comment on applications, with the ultimate decision being made by West Devon Borough Council's Development Management and Licensing Committee.

It has been wonderful to have members of the public attending planning meetings and giving their perspective on applications. These additional incites have helped the Planning Committee make considered comments and apply the correct material considerations to responses.

As a council we welcome public participation in all aspects of council decision making and always encourage attendance at meetings.

I have enjoyed my role as Vice-Chairman and assisting Councillor Ireland in running the Planning Committee meetings.

I would like to thank other members of the Committee and Town Councillors for their time, historic and local knowledge, which has been invaluable during decision making and should never be underestimated.

Here's looking forward to another year as a Councillor.

**Cllr Jessop (Vice-Chairman)**

### **Policy & Resources (P&R) Committee – Cllr Deborah Sanger (Chairman)**

This year has finally seen the return to face-to-face meetings, and on the 17<sup>th</sup> May 2021 the Policy and Resources (P&R) Committee was the first one held in person, although still away from the Chamber, and deploying the use of microphones and well-dispersed tables in the Charter Hall to reduce Covid risks. For some newer councillors this was their first in-person experience, and our first opportunity to meet and see an entire person and not just their head and shoulders for some considerable time!

P&R is responsible for overseeing the Town Council's finances and ensuring our outgoings do not exceed our planned budgets for the year as well as making sure we comply with any relevant policies.

P&R also reviews policies and approves any new policies we need. It is surprising just how many of these a well-run organisation needs and they cover everything we do, for example from ensuring safe lone-working, our Code of Conduct for councillors, document retention, health and safety of our staff - including our park staff, the use of CCTV, and many more besides.

In an ever-changing business environment, we have to keep up with technology and make sure we are acting in the best interests of the council so that we can provide the best service we can to the people of Okehampton. This is increasingly something of challenge as support and funding for services is further reduced from Devon County Council and West Devon Borough Council due to their own financial pressures.

We have nevertheless continued to take on the maintenance, repairs and running of the public toilets. We have also coped with providing our public services such as the park, play areas and seating, for an increasing population as the new housing areas to the East continue to expand. With these houses being in the Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council area they do not pay anything towards the costs incurred by the Town Council.

This year we have also had additional costs of felling trees affected by ash die-back, and we have a large project overseeing the roof repairs essential for the Charter Hall building. We always aim to plan ahead so we can use our reserved ear-marked funds for any major repairs.

Naturally P&R have also been involved in setting this year's precept, and every council expenditure is looked at to make sure we can keep any increase to an absolute minimum.

Essential increases are largely due to new unavoidable expenditure such as the cemetery, the toilets, the running of the CCTV, and increased pressures from an expanding population.

As ever our excellent Clerk has guided us through the difficulties of Zoom meetings, and moving into Charter Hall meetings, as well as the intricacies of the legalities relating to our work with policies and financial matters. It has been an exceptionally busy year for the Clerk and her team, especially with the taking on of the cemetery management which involves a great number of legal issues to oversee.

Finally, it is good to share the success of one of the more enjoyable aspects of the P&R Committee's responsibilities which is the distribution of grants to local organisations benefitting the town's residents.

In these more financially challenging times, with two years of restrictions on meeting together, with shops and businesses having had to cope with reduced incomes, and now as we all face increasing costs of fuel and tax rises the Town Council does its best to support both our tenants, and our many community groups.

This year grants have been given to Everything Okehampton, Okey Music Day, the Community Transport Group, Meldon Viaduct, the Ockment Centre, Wren Music, OCRA, and several others. A full list of those who have benefited can be found later in the report.

It is lovely to be able to help our local groups who always do such an important job for the people of Okehampton in making us a welcome and vibrant community.

### **Property Committee – Cllr Ann Wood (Chairman)**

The Property Committee was hoping to be able to say that the Charter Hall has now got a new roof and no leaks! Unfortunately, due to the small issue of a global pandemic the inspections and actual works have been severely delayed. However, the pandemic did not curtail the planning so we are now hoping that the works will start in the not-too-distant future, either May or June, and there will be no further delays. Fingers crossed that the Charter Hall will not be out of use for too long once the works start.

Okehampton Town Council has however managed to give the Chamber a new look for weddings which has proved popular with many happy couples. If you are planning a civil wedding, why not enquire?

Okehampton Town Council has now signed a new 6 year lease with West Devon Borough Council, to manage Market Street public toilets. We are hoping that the recent spates of criminal damage inflicted on them does not continue.

Once again the hire income has been curtailed for quite a few months but bookings and events have taken place in the Chamber and Charter Hall. It is nice to see coffee mornings back again and being so well attended bringing much needed revenue to



local charities and community groups. One of my personal favourite events was the celebration of the return of the regular train service between Okehampton and Exeter.

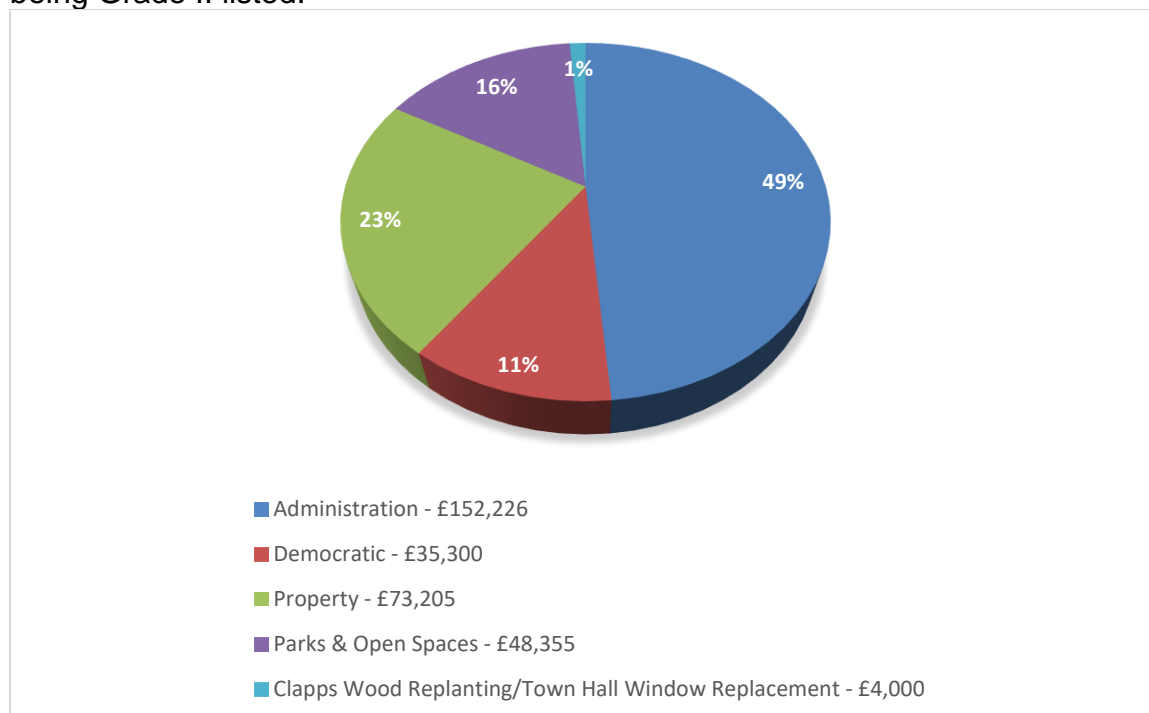
## **Budget**

Financially 2021/22 continued to be challenging for budgets as well as most other aspects of life. The Charter Hall and other facilities were closed for part of the year because of the pandemic and although bookings slowly started to increase, the restrictions and risk of infection continued to have an impact through the year. The first phase of the long awaited CCTV system covering part of the town and Simmons Park came to fruition. It is hoped that phase two, which will complete scheme, will be finalised within 2022/23.

Budget workshops were held for councillors in September, half way through the financial year, when spending to date was reviewed and initial thoughts about the budget for 2022/23 were considered. In December 2021 the budget and precept for 2022/23, £313,086, was set by full Council.

The increase in the precept demand by Okehampton Town Council from the 2021/22 budget equates to £0.12 p/week on a Band D property, which helps to put into perspective the actual percentage which is 4.7%. Plans for the replacement of the Charter Hall roof and possibly associated buildings is planned for 2022, and the search for land to purchase for use as a future burial ground is beginning. Trees have been replanted in Clapps Wood following the felling of those infected with Ash Dieback disease and of course there are plans in progress for celebrations marking the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

A breakdown of the budget can be seen in the following chart. The chart includes the figures for each committee which amount to £309,086 and an additional £4,000 towards the replanting of Clapps Wood if it is needed and/or towards the future replacement of the Town Hall windows which are beginning to rot. The Town Hall being Grade II listed.



## Grants Awarded - 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022

The Council's Grants Policy clearly sets out the criteria 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>.

Funds left in the grant budget at the end of the 2020/21 financial year were added to the pot for 2021/22 which increased it significantly from £29,000 to £37,358. This has allowed the council to assist additional not-for-profit groups and organisations. In 2022/23 the grant budget is returning to the previous figure of £29,000. The following grants have been awarded in this financial year:

<b>Recipient Organisation</b>	<b>Amount of Grant (£)</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
Okehampton Park Run	500.00	Park Run set up costs
Museum of Dartmoor Life	3500.00	Maintenance costs of the museum
Tourist Information Facility	1500.00	Running costs of the facility
South Western Ambulance Charity	73.85	Purchase of equipment
Okehampton Fairtrade Group	220.00	Production of a leaflet
Poppy Appeal	50.00	Remembrance Service 2021 Wreath
Okehampton Music Day	500.00	Event promotion
Okehampton United Ecclesiastical Charity	5000.00	Replacement of the Town Clock
Okehampton Duke of Edinburgh	500.00	Insurance costs
Okehampton Hamlets Beating of the Bounds	100.00	Shuttlebus from the town
Okehampton District Transport Group	1000.00	To enable the group to continue to offer services without increasing fares
Okehampton Sqn RAF Air Cadets	500.00	The purchase of two flight simulators
Okehampton Carnival	1000.00	Annual carnival costs
Everything Okehampton	1000.00	Christmas Lights
Meldon Viaduct	500.00	Trust repairs and renewals fund
1 <sup>st</sup> Okehampton Rainbows & Brownies	500.00	Guiding UK visit to Legoland
Okement Rivers Improvement Group	500.00	Noticeboard repairs and seat maintenance
Who Let the Dads Out	500.00	Hall hire, refreshments, activities and equipment
Tor Support Services	500.00	Counselling services for children and young people
All Together Okehampton	475.00	Wellbeing activities, venue hire & refreshments
Ockment Centre	5000.00	Staffing provision for reception
Wren Music	500.00	Lantern Procession
Okehampton Friendly Circle	400.00	Monthly speakers and Christmas lunch
Okehampton Community Garden	500.00	Insurance and provision of health & safety equipment
All Together Okehampton	475.00	Wellbeing activities
Okehampton United Charity	1638.66	Provision of allotments
Okehampton Army Cadet Force	500.00	A sum up to the value of £500 for the purchase of a Gazebo for events
1 <sup>st</sup> Okehampton Guides & Rangers	500.00	Transport to camping event
Okehampton Community Recreation Association	500.00	Fields in Trust and Queens Jubilee events

Okehampton Friendship Group	250.00	Room hire, refreshments and entertainment
Okehampton Men's Hockey Club	250.00	Coaching qualification courses
Okehampton Rugby Football Club	500.00	Team kit for junior squad
Cheeky Monkeys Toddler Group	395.00	Craft supplies, snacks, toys and books
Okehampton & Hamlets Twinning Association	500.00	Hosting a visit of representatives from Craon
Okehampton Primary School Parent PTFA	500.00	For the purchase of a whiteboard and chalk board for external use by pupils and storage sheds
Friends of Okehampton Library	370.48	Cushions for children, sensory items for pre-school sessions

The COVID19 grant fund created by the Council in from its reserves for 2020/21 was rolled over to 2021/22. The purpose of the grant 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. No grants from this fund have been applied for in this financial year and the grant ceases on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022.

### **Councillor Attendance at Meetings 2021/22**

From 5<sup>th</sup> May 2021 to 21<sup>st</sup> March 2022

	Full Council (14)	Committees				Total	Possible Attendance	Percentage %
		P & R (11)	Planning (13)	Parks (4)	Property (5)			
Cllr B Tolley	12	9	10	4	4	39	47	82.98
Cllr A Wood	12	9	9	3	5	38	47	80.85
Cllr M Ireland	14	11	13	3	5	46	47	97.87
Cllr D Travers	9	9	8	3	3	32	47	68.09
Cllr D Sanger	14	11	12	4	5	46	47	97.87
Cllr T Abbots	14	X	12	2	X	28	31	90.32
Cllr G Button	12	9	X	4	X	25	29	86.21
Cllr J Goffey	14	[5] 5	[7] 7	X	5	31	31	100
Cllr C Holt	13	X	X	4	4	21	23	91.30
Cllr P Jessop	10	X	11	4	X	25	31	80.65
Cllr T Leech	14	[6] 6	[6] 5	4	X	29	30	96.67
Cllr C Marsh	14	11	X	4	X	29	29	100
Cllr B Matravers	13	11	12	X	X	36	38	94.74
Cllr J Yelland	12	10	X	X	5	27	30	90.00

#### **Key**

Numbers in ( ) = number of meetings held

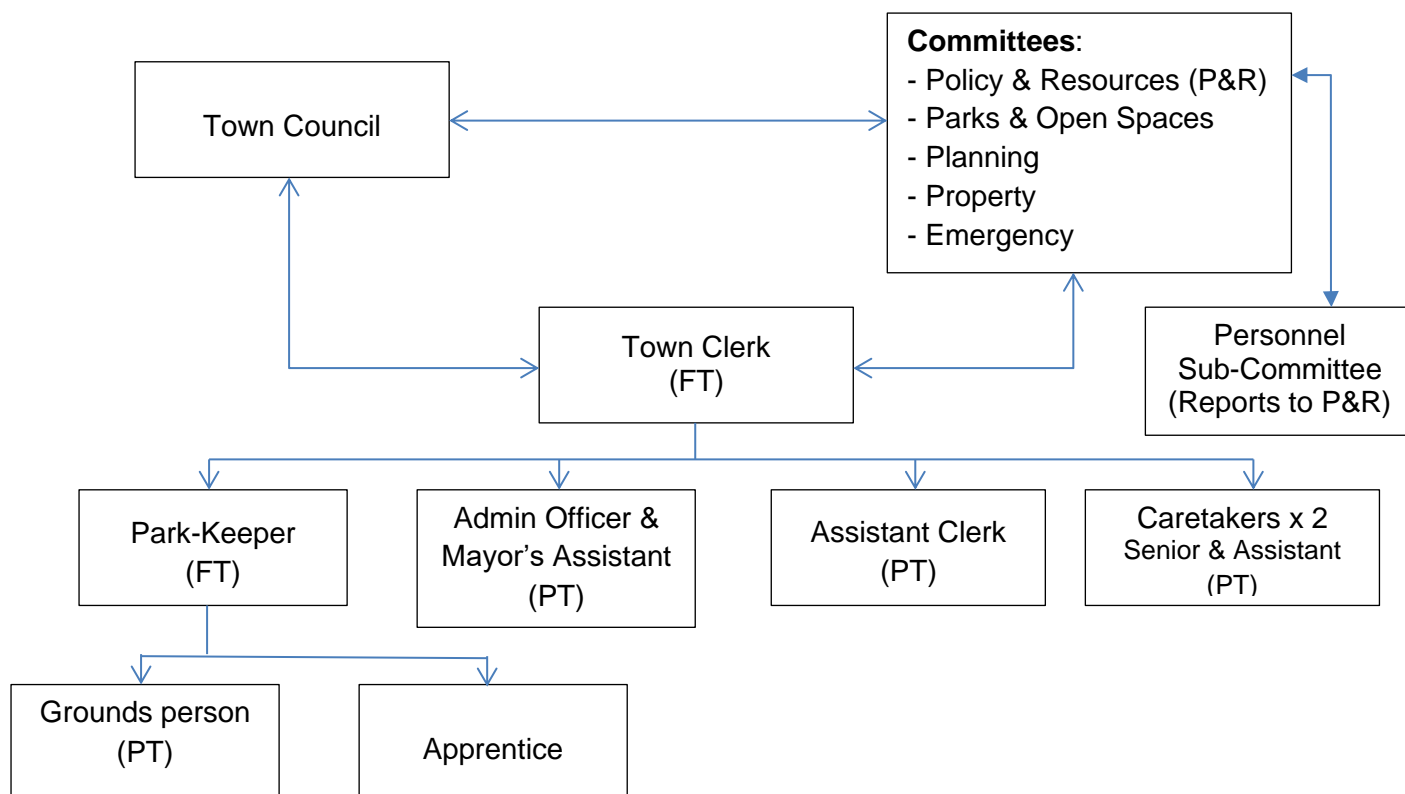
P&R = Policy & Resources

X = Not a member of that Committee

[ ] Change of committee, number of meetings



## Town Council Structure



FT = Full Time  
PT = Part Time



Council Chamber Civic Ceremony Setup