

Okehampton Town Council

**Strategic Plan
2023-2027**

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Introduction

This Strategic Plan sets out Okehampton Town Councils aims and objectives and provides the policy framework within which the elected Members (Councillors) make decisions and the Officers (staff) conduct their day-to-day work.

Okehampton Town Council has 14 elected members and elections take place every four years, the next being in May 2027. The Council is non-political and operates through Committees of which there are 4; Policy and Resources, Parks and Open Spaces, Property and Planning, all of which are decision making and report to the Full Council. In 2018 the Council adopted the Power of Competence which was renewed in 2023 following the elections.

There are 8 members of staff. The Town Clerk, an Assistant Town Clerk, Administration Assistant and Mayors PA, 2 Caretakers (Senior and Assistant), a Park-Keeper, Groundsperson and Horticultural Apprentice. The Town Clerk, Park-Keeper and Apprentice being full-time employees.

In September 2022 Okehampton Town Council presented West Devon Borough Council (WDBC) with a petition for a Community Governance review of its boundary the aim of which is to bring the recent urban developments into the town which would give the council greater opportunity to:

- continue to afford community projects
- continue to provide services for the benefit of all
- give OTC a greater democratic voice within the county and central government
- bring increased opportunities and access to a wider range of funding
- to provide future growth opportunities

WDBC has twelve months from the petition validation date (November 2022) to complete the review

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.

Priorities

Further information about each priority can be found within the specific strands of the Strategic Plan.

Democracy (D) – Okehampton Town Council consists of an elected body of local people to provide a strong voice on decisions and services that affect the everyday life of local people including:

- D1 Representation – the council will act as democratically elected leader of, and advocate for, the interests of the community. Councillors will receive support in their roles as representatives, leaders and the delivery of participation and engagement in public life.
- D2 General Power of Competence (GPC) – the council will seek to maintain the GPC in order that it has the fullest opportunity to act for, and in the interests of, the residents of the town.
- D3 Engagement – the council will seek to engage with electors before making changes that affect the populace or relevant stakeholder groups. This will take place through Councillor Surgeries, the Annual Council Meeting and Town Assembly, Council and Committee Meetings, the Council website, social media and the press.
- D4 Civic/Ceremonial – the council will seek to sustain civic and ceremonial traditions

Climate Change and Biodiversity (Cc) – Okehampton Town Council has signed up to the Devon Climate Declaration which was prepared by a consortium of public, private and voluntary organisations collaborating through a Devon Climate Emergency Response Group and will review its practices with a view to reducing its carbon footprint, encouraging others to do the same

- Cc1 Reduction - the council will review its plans **and strive** to reduce its carbon emissions to meet or exceed the targets within the Devon Climate declaration
- Cc2 Working Together – the council will work with town residents, businesses, **other local authorities** and visitors to assist in the reduction of Okehampton's production and consumption emissions to meet IPCC recommendations at the latest.
- Cc3 Risk - the council will work to understand the near-term and future risks of climate change for Devon to plan for how our infrastructure, public services and communities will have to adapt for a 1.5+degree warmer world
- Cc4 Encouragement - the council will encourage local organisations, businesses, communities and individuals to do the same

Community (C) – Okehampton Town Council seeks to be at the heart of the community and its activities. It will work closely with local voluntary, business, community groups and third/public sector partners within Okehampton that are key to vibrant and successful community life.

- C1 Working Together – the council will work with the Borough and County Councils, local Town and Parish Councils, and other representative bodies, partners and public authorities to promote a vibrant and healthy community life and wellbeing.

- C2 Community Engagement – the council will develop communications to meet statutory and other requirements to communicate key messages
- C3 Financial Assistance – the council will maintain a Grants Scheme to support eligible organisations providing benefits to the residents of Okehampton town
- C4 Outside Bodies – the council will appoint representatives to, and work with, community and other groups supporting residents of the town
- C5 Community Assets – the council will manage the community assets in its ownership and that it is responsible for to support the development and delivery of community services, benefits and community wellbeing
- C6 Allotments - the council will support other bodies to maintain allotments to service the Parish as necessary
- C7 Burial Grounds – the council will maintain a burial ground to service the Parish, including making provision for additional burial facilities, as necessary
- C8 Events – the council will seek to deliver events marking significant national occasions whether on an annual or occasional basis, and support where possible third-party events
- C9 Emergency Plan – the council will strive to help coordinate responses to social and environmental emergencies that may arise

Environment (En) – Okehampton has a strong identity and character due to its rich natural heritage. The Town Council will work to ensure this heritage is protected and enhanced for present and future generations, including those buildings and areas of land which it owns or is responsible for.

- En1 Environment (general) – the council will actively contribute to and promote policies and initiatives that support, protect and sensitively and sustainably develop the unique historic, build and natural environments of the town
- En2 Environment (council ownership) – the council will maintain and protect the heritage and natural assets in its ownership, and that it is responsible for, including through the maintenance of appropriate records, maintenance plans, inspections and works
- En3 Trees – the council will manage and maintain shrubs and trees on land which it owns or is responsible for, including the maintenance of inspection, arboriculture and planting schemes
- En4 Recreation – the council will maintain, on land that it owns or is responsible for, existing areas of leisure and recreation purposes
- En5 New Development – the council will seek to inform and shape new development in the town by scrutinising and commenting on all planning applications to ensure sustainable and managed growth supported by the appropriate infrastructure. This includes working closely with the joint Okehampton Hamlets and Town Neighbourhood Development Plan, now and once approved.

Economy (Ec) – Okehampton Town Council will work to support the business community and other stakeholders within the local economy and promote footfall as well as embedding good practice in its roles as an employer, landlord, steward of community assets and service provider

- Ec1 Economic Development – the council will seek to support and/or deliver initiatives to promote, develop and maintain a healthy local economy and commercial sector
- Ec2 Working Together – the council will work with representative bodies, partners and public authorities to promote a vibrant and healthy local economy
- Ec3 Best Value – the council will work to minimise council costs and provide value for money services which are relevant, efficient economic and effective. In doing so it will reflect good employment and business practices
- Ec5 Income Generation – the council will manage its commercial assets to provide income streams on a commercial basis to support the development and delivery of community services and benefits. The council will also seek to develop new income streams as opportunities arise which contribute to the local economy and to maximise investment income.

Workforce (W) – Okehampton Town Council employs 8 members of staff and has 14 elected members all of whom play an important part in the efficient delivery of council services

- W1 Training and Support – the council will support employees and members to undertake their respective roles efficiently, and safely by providing them with training relevant to their requirements and to aid professional development
- W2 Policy – the council will follow legislation and guidance ensuring that they are a good supportive employer
- W3 Health & Safety - the council will ensure that it has, and keeps regularly reviewed, the necessary policies ensure the health, safety and welfare of its employees and members, and provide the necessary personal protective equipment

Climate Change and Biodiversity (Cc)

Okehampton Town Council has signed up to the Devon Climate Declaration which was prepared by a consortium of public, private and voluntary organisations collaborating through a Devon Climate Emergency Response Group and will review its practices with a view to reducing its carbon footprint, encouraging others to do the same

- Cc1 Reduction - the council will review its plans and strive to reduce its carbon emissions to meet or exceed the targets within the Devon Climate declaration

Okehampton Town Council has set up a working group to review its own internal practices including the supplies it uses, the services it provides and other possibilities with a view to reducing its own carbon emissions, buying locally and sustainably where possible. The group will also investigate the feasibility of the provision of additional services and assistance to the community enabling them to reduce their own carbon footprints.

Details of actions taken by the Council as of March 2020 and further ideas for investigation and consideration is included at the end of this document.

- Cc2 Working Together – the council will work with town residents, businesses, other local authorities and visitors to assist in the reduction of Okehampton’s production and consumption emissions to meet IPCC recommendations at the latest.

A wider reaching group comprising of Members of other surrounding local parish and town councils has been initiated by Okehampton Town Council. The aim of the group is to share ideas, possibilities, practices put into place and the feasibility of bulk purchasing.

Members of the group will feedback information and ideas to their own councils for further investigation and consideration.

- Cc3 Risk - the council will work to understand the near-term and future risks of climate change for Devon to plan for how our infrastructure, public services and communities will have to adapt for a +1.5 degree Celsius, or more, warmer world

To enable the Council to better keep abreast of information and initiatives as they come forward, Members of the Council have been nominated to attend other climate related meetings:

- Okehampton Climate Action Group
- Corporate meetings; ie DCC, WDBC

These Councillors will feedback to the Climate Change Working Group relevant information which will be acted upon accordingly.

- Cc4 Encouragement - the council will encourage local organisations, businesses, communities and individuals to do the same

The Council, in January 2020, held an eco-coffee morning with the aim of highlighting to the community and individuals’ easy ways in which they can each reduce their carbon footprint and information that may have been relevant to them. This event was successful and further events will be held.

Actions Okehampton Town Council has taken to reduce its impact on the climate and its carbon footprint:

- Signed up to the Devon Climate Declaration (2019)
- Signed up to the Tree Charter (2019)
- Town/Charter Hall boiler replaced in 2018 with an energy efficient model
- Disposable plastic cups replaced with reusable 'picnic' style glasses for office and visitor use
- Waste collected by Devon Contract Waste who operate a "Zero to Landfill" policy, the waste is sorted and recycled or used for energy generation
- Existing lightbulbs replaced with energy saving LED lightbulbs when necessary
- Shredded paper used in composting from office and parks
- Parks waste from maintenance used in composting which is then used on the parks flower beds
- Parks pond fed by natural water source
- Replanting any trees on its land as and when any are removed due to disease, are dying or have fallen with native species, like for like where possible
- West Bridge verge planted with Wildflowers and maintained as a wildflower meadow
- Recycling of printer ink cartridges and toners
- Charter Hall hirers encouraged to recycle as much waste as possible
- Council coffee grounds used in composting
- Working Group stand at the Rotary Group coffee morning in the Charter Hall on 30th November 2019 and holding community event/council coffee morning on 18th January 2020 promoting climate change
- Supporting the proposed regular rail link from Okehampton to Exeter and beyond
- Has nominated Councillors to attend other climate related meetings:
 - Okehampton Climate Action Group
 - Corporate meetings; ie DCC, WDBC

2020

- Held an 'Eco Awareness' coffee morning on 18th January 2020
- Set up a Climate Group outside of the remit of the Town Council for representatives from local councils in the locality to share ideas
- Signed up to Devon Contract Waste's newly formed Circular Economy Scheme to enhance and promote recycling within the Council
- Received and planted a Landmark Tree in March 2020 to help mark and replenish tree loss from the Ash Dieback Disease
- Tree Policy relating to the felling of trees
- Working with StOC to improve management of the meadow in Simmons Park to further encourage biodiversity
- Members given the opportunity to 'opt-out' of receiving hard paper copies of meeting agendas and associated papers (as of March 2020 8 Members had signed up)
- Paper supply changed to 100% recycled off white paper (February 2020)
- Joined Devon Communities Together (August 2020)
- Electricity for Fairplace toilets supplied by Octopus Energy. 100% renewable energy

2021

- Boxes delivered to Ockment Centre for the public to recycle foil packs (i.e., Crisp packets)
- Renewed waste removal contract with Devon Contract Waste at a reduced cost. The only zero to landfill operator in the Southwest
- Attended WDBC Climate Change Forum and Devon Donut Group
- Planted a sensory garden at Fairplace to encourage wildlife

- Installed bird boxes in Simmons Park
- Installed recycled plastic picnic benches in Simmons Park. Supplied by Devon Contract Waste and made from plastic recycled in the Southwest.
- Attended the Uniting Rural Communities to Tackle Climate Change event

2022

- Owl boxes planned to be installed
- More bee friendly planting in sensory garden
- Bird feeders installed in Simmons Park
- New wildflower area created
- New pond flowers planted to encourage wildlife
- Wildflower verges planted
- Councillors opting out of receiving paper copies of agendas and associated reports
- Areas in the park left for 'no mow in May' and not mowed in June
- New orchids in the meadow
- Soft plastic and batteries recycling point in the Council office
- Replaced some bins with bins made from recycled plastics
- Climate neutral production of office printer and climate neutral printing (printer lease dates 04.10.2022 – 03.10.2027)
- Supported Plastic Free Okehampton Group to start the water Refill Scheme
- Purchased refillable water bottles to commemorate the Queens Platinum Jubilee
- Purchased compostable cups and plates for the Platinum Jubilee Celebrations 2022
- Council Hosted Big Green Week Community Event
- Bus and train timetables available for the public from the Town Hall
- Replaced felled Ash Trees in Clapps Wood (felled due to ash-dieback)

Future Plans

The Climate Change Working Group is/will be investigating what other actions it can take in relation to its own property/areas of business including;

- Renewable energy
 - Solar panel installation on the Charter Hall roof as part of the roof replacement project
 - Solar panels to be considered for the Tractor shed in the park
- Wildflower verge planting on other sites i.e., skate park, verges
- Charging point for electric vehicles in Simmons Park
- Production of an Okehampton hub bus map to encourage public transport use
- Review use of chemicals used for weed control
- Working with Tamar Energy to support vulnerable residents
- Investigate possible site for public gardens or allotments

Community (C)

Okehampton Town Council seeks to be at the heart of the community and its activities. It will work closely with local voluntary, business, community groups and third/public sector partners within Okehampton that are key to vibrant and successful community life.

- C1 Working Together – the council will work with the Borough and County Councils, local Town and Parish Councils, and other representative bodies, partners and public authorities to promote a vibrant and healthy community life and wellbeing.

Representative Members of both West Devon Borough Council (WDBC) and Devon County Council (DCC) are invited to attend meetings of the Council. They provide information and similarly feedback to WDBC/DCC any issues that may have arisen.

Members of WDBC, DCC and other bodies can be invited to the regular Councillor Surgeries giving residents the opportunity to speak directly with them in a local setting.

When necessary the different tiers of Council work together on initiatives to improve facilities within the town and surrounding areas, this may include the holding of joint meetings and/or public consultations.

- C2 Community Engagement – the Council will develop communications to meet statutory and other requirements to communicate key messages

Community engagement is about giving local people a voice and involving them in the decisions that affect them and their community. It is about development of relationships and clear communication to deliver better services and projects.

The aim of this strategy is to engage residents and encourage their participation in decision making to secure better services and to create a more active and informed community. This strategy sets out how Okehampton Town Council will engage its community across a broad range of its activities and sets out short, medium, and long term aims.

At present residents and other interested persons/organisations can communicate with or receive information from the Council in the following ways:

A – NEWSLETTER published monthly which includes names and contact details of the staff and all councillors, details of forthcoming meetings, councillor surgeries, information about local issues and council activities. Hard copies are made available in the Library, Ockment Centre and Town Hall, and online through the email mailing list, website and social media.

B – ANNUAL REPORT published in March. It includes details of council activities, achievements, its organisational structure, grants awarded and a summary of accounts. Hard copies are made available in the Library, Ockment Centre and Town Hall, and online through the email mailing list, website and social media.

C – WEBSITE address is www.okehampton.gov.uk Information and photographs are updated regularly, details include information about the council

and its activities, local amenities and organisations, current issues, and events. Links to the council's website can also be added to the websites and apps of other tourism organisations, and vice-versa.

D – ANNUAL TOWN MEETING is held in March or April at 7p.m. and gives electors of the parish a chance to air their views or ask questions on matters relating to Okehampton. A speaker will generally give an address on a local issue such as restoring the passenger service to the railway, or relevant items for example cyber security.

E – COUNCIL MEETINGS members of the public are welcome to attend meetings of the council and are given the opportunity to address the councillors on local issues. There is no requirement to make a formal request to speak prior to a meeting.

F – CONTACT WITH CLERK OR OTHER STAFF can be made by telephone, email, post or by calling at the office in the Town Hall from 9:30am to 4pm on Monday to Thursday and at other times by appointment.

G – COUNCILLOR SURGERY is held from 10am to 12noon on the third Thursday of each month except August and December, in the Council Chamber, Town Hall or online. Two councillors are available at these times to speak to residents about local matters. Other parties can be invited to co-host the events.

H – INVESTITURE OF NEW MAYOR is held in May and includes announcement of those persons who have been given Mayoral Awards. Local organisations are invited to send representatives to the event which is followed by refreshments where different community leaders and groups can exchange ideas and information.

I – FACEBOOK has been set up for the Council and the Mayor and posts are shared to the Okehampton Information Hub

J – PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS may be held to gauge support for projects or to communicate intention and information to residents, on a formal or informal basis if expedient to do so.

K – FEEDBACK from members of the public and stakeholders is welcomed, and the council will aim to find out what the community wants or expects from its council and how content it is with existing services by circulating information on activities and inviting residents to submit their observations to the council by email or letter. Messages and comments submitted through social media platforms will not be considered as it is not possible to ensure they are all captured. Relevant and appropriate comments will be considered by the Council or one of its committees or working parties.

L – EVENTS - the Council will consider attending other locally held events such as Okehampton Show, possibly sharing a space with other stakeholders and hosting its own coffee mornings.

C3 Financial Assistance – the Council will maintain a Grants Scheme to support eligible organisations providing benefits to the residents of Okehampton town

Council Policy clearly sets out the criteria and application process, and applications are routinely considered at meetings of the Policy & Resources Committee.

The Grants Budget is reviewed annually as part of the precept and budget setting process.

C4 Outside Bodies – the Council will appoint representatives to, and work with, community and other groups supporting residents of the town

Members are nominated at the annual Council Meeting to represent and support local community groups and organisations where the council has been invited to provide representation, subject to councillor availability.

The majority of these positions are historical, with the groups having been allocated a Councillor representative for a number of years. Requests from other groups or suggestions by Councillors are welcomed and will be considered by the Council as appropriate.

Nominated Councillors will attend meetings of the group and report back any activity, issues, comments or concerns to the Council for information. They will also endeavour to support the group's activities, the level of involvement the Councillor can offer being at their own personal discretion.

Foreign visitors to the town are encouraged, and on application by local organisations, a reception for visiting groups may be hosted on council premises.

C5 Community Assets – the Council will manage the community assets in its ownership and that it is responsible for to support the development and delivery of community services, benefits and community wellbeing

The Council has the following community assets that it owns or is responsible for, including:

- Simmons Park, the skate park, the garden area at Fairplace, picnic area behind Lidl and the wildflower verge at Westbridge
- Public toilets at Fairplace and those in Market Street that are leased from West Devon Borough Council.
- The Town Hall, which is Grade II listed, and the Charter Hall
- The Cemetery adjacent to All Saints Church in which the first burial took place in 2009

Simmons Park is often used by groups/organisation for events to fundraise for their cause or to provide activities for the community to attend. The Charter Hall is utilised most Saturdays by local groups for fundraising coffee mornings, the facility is offered at a reduced rate for this purpose.

Other facilities are available for hire by local groups and others from further away, the majority of whom use them to hold events for the benefit of the community.

In order to improve the safety and wellbeing of residents and the community the installation of a CCTV system covering much of the town centre and Simmons Park has been provided by the Town Council.

- C6 Allotments - the council will support other bodies to maintain allotments to service the Parish as necessary

Allotments are provided and managed by Okehampton United Charities (OUC) for use by residents residing within the boundary of the town and hamlets councils. A grant request is submitted annually by the OUC to both councils covering the cost of the provision of the allotments.

Councils have a statutory duty to provide allotments and the arrangement with the OUC takes responsibility for the management of them from the councils, whilst still enabling the delivery of this facility for residents.

- C7 Burial Grounds – the council will maintain a burial ground to service the Parish, including making provision for additional burial facilities, as necessary

In 2006 the Council purchased a strip of land adjacent to All Saints Church for the provision of burials. Funding received from burials on this land is set aside in an earmarked fund for the purchase of future land when required.

West Devon Borough Council is responsible for the closed graveyards, and the other open graveyard is owned and managed by the Northmoor Ministry although the Town Council does cut the grass in the open graveyard.

- C8 Events – the council will seek to deliver events marking significant national occasions whether on an annual or occasional basis, and support where possible third-party events

The Council holds annual various Civic events that welcome public participation; the Civic Service and Mayor Choosing Ceremony for example and will make every effort to ensure these continue into the future.

In addition to the regular events, the Council will endeavour to mark significant occasions appropriately, taking into account the benefit to the community and costs.

Equally the Council works with other local organisations and attends events such as Remembrance Day and Edwardian Evening in an official capacity.

- C9 Emergency Plan – the council will strive to help coordinate responses to social and environmental emergencies that may arise

Okehampton Town Council has a Business Continuity Plan which sets out how it will continue to operate and provide services in the event its staff or buildings are affected in any way.

The Council will work with other organisations and stakeholders to support, where possible, a response to emergency situations that may arise on a local or national scale.

Democracy (D)

Okehampton Town Council consists of an elected body of local people to provide a strong voice on decisions and services that affect the everyday life of local people including:

- D1 Representation – the Council will act as democratically elected leader of, and advocate for, the interests of the community. Councillors will receive support in their roles as representatives, leaders and the delivery of participation and engagement in public life.

Okehampton Town Council consists of 14 Members who are either elected at the local Council elections which take place 4 yearly, the next being scheduled for May 2027, or co-opted in the event there is an unfilled vacancy or if a casual vacancy arises during that 4 year period.

Members are provided with an induction pack which comprises a variety of information including the schedule of meetings, policies and procedures, the Code of Conduct, Standing Orders and a boundary map. In order to assist Members settling into and understanding their role internal induction sessions are arranged by the Town Clerk. Members are also strongly encouraged to attend Devon Association of Local Councils courses, particularly those aimed at new Councillors and any that specifically relate to a committee they may be nominated to sit on; for example planning and finance.

The Town Clerk operates an 'open door' policy and Members are encouraged to make appointments to speak to her about any concerns or issues they may have, including about how the Council operates and expectations of them in their role as Councillor.

- D2 General Power of Competence (GPC) – the Council will seek to maintain the GPC in order that it has the fullest opportunity to act for, and in the interests of, the residents of the town.

The GPC, as set out in the Localism Act 2011, extends the ability of local Councils allowing them to do anything an individual can do although this is subject to statutory prohibitions, restrictions or limitations which must be complied with. For example, the Council could invest in domestic property or set up a business trading arm.

Okehampton Town Council reaffirmed its eligibility to hold the GPC, which remains in place until the annual meeting after the next ordinary elections, at its annual meeting May 2023. The criteria a Council must meet is that at least two-thirds of Members (10 for Okehampton Town Council) must have been elected and the Clerk must hold a relevant qualification, which includes the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA).

- D3 Engagement – the council will seek to engage with electors before making changes that affect the populace or relevant stakeholder groups. This will take place through Councillor Surgeries, the Annual Council Meeting and Town Assembly, Council and Committee Meetings, the Council website, social media and the press.

Councillor Surgeries, to which the other 2 tiers of Councils and other bodies such as the police can be invited to take part in. These surgeries are not held in August and December or in the run up to local elections in line with guidance

issued. The Council is aware that daytime events are not suitable for everyone and will occasionally host a Saturday coffee morning or other event.

Members of the public are also welcomed to meetings of the Council and can make appointments to speak with Members or the Town Clerk at a time convenient to both parties. An Annual Town Assembly is normally held in March or April when Members are available to talk to residents about any issues, concerns or questions they may have.

Meetings and events are publicised in various ways which may include the website, social media, noticeboards and in the local paper.

Issues that affect the residents and/or stakeholder groups within the local community will be communicated by way of the means already stated, or if felt to be beneficial wider consultation events may be held or supported by the Council.

Policies and documents setting out how the Council will run and manage its functions efficiently, effectively and transparently are available on the Council website. These are regularly reviewed and include:

- Standing Orders
- Financial Regulations
- Financial Management Risk Assessment
- Privacy and Data Protection Policies
- Subject Access Request Policy
- Strategic Plan
- Complaints Policy
- Audit Reports
- Budgets

D4 Civic/Ceremonial – the Council will seek to sustain civic and ceremonial traditions

Many of the Civic/Ceremonial events that are held or attended annually by the Council have an historical background. The Council seeks to sustain and uphold the traditions surrounding its own events, whilst taking into account that:

- the majority of its income is funded through the precept
- being conscious of its carbon footprint, and
- future sustainability

Town Council events include the Annual Mayor Choosing Ceremony and Civic Service.

A Civic Protocol/Guideline document setting out how these events are held to aid the continuity of these traditions has been developed.

Economy (Ec)

Okehampton Town Council will work to support the business community and other stakeholders within the local economy and promote footfall as well as embedding good practice in its roles as an employer, landlord, steward of community assets and service provider

Ec1 Economic Development – the Council will seek to support and/or deliver initiatives to promote, develop and maintain a healthy local economy and commercial sector

Okehampton is without a Chamber of Trade but does have active organisations who promote the work of local traders which encourages a healthy economy. The Town Council is working with West Devon Borough Council to ascertain the feasibility of the creation of a Business Improvement District.

A Town Guide, information boards and new signage to help promote footfall, especially between the town centre and railway station has been provided by the Town Council who also maintain public toilets and open spaces for the enjoyment and use of its residents and visitors.

The town centre was, and remains, relatively healthy in that there are few vacant commercial premises, the majority of the occupied properties consisting of independent businesses¹.

The state of the economy and depth of any depression arising from the recent and ongoing crisis remains to be seen, and the Council will endeavour to support local groups and organisations throughout this period.

Ec2 Working Together – the Council will work with representative bodies, partners and public authorities to promote a vibrant and healthy local economy

The Council strives to work proactively with all bodies, particularly West Devon Borough Council and Devon County Council who constitute the other two tiers of councils in Devon.

Member representatives of WDBC and DCC regularly attend meetings of the Council and can be invited to join the Town Council Members at their regular Councillor Surgeries offering members of the public a chance to meet with them face to face.

Public consultations will be held by various means which may include social media, website, noticeboards and the press. Face to face public consultation events may also be held and to which other bodies may be asked to attend and/or participate in as necessary.

All representative bodies and members of the public are welcomed to meetings of the Council and to make appointments to meet with Members and the Town Clerk to discuss items of concern or suggestions they may have.

¹ As evidenced in the Okehampton Town Benchmarking Report, June 2019

Ec3 Best Value – the Council will work to minimise Council costs and provide value for money services which are relevant, efficient, economic and effective. In doing so it will reflect good employment and business practices

Okehampton Town Council holds annual budget workshops when detailed reviews of each of its budget headings are undertaken to identify areas in which cost savings could be made in relation to its expenditure.

Quotations for goods and services are obtained where possible and in line with Financial Regulations in order to ensure best value is obtained, taking into account its origin and the carbon footprint of transportation of the item or persons.

Ec4 Income Generation – the council will manage its commercial assets to provide income streams on a commercial basis to support the development and delivery of community services and benefits. The council will also seek to develop new income streams as opportunities arise which contribute to the local economy and to maximise investment income.

Okehampton Town Council will undertake marketing of its facilities that are available for hire on a more proactive basis once external and internal improvements to enhance them have been completed. In 2022 the Council Chamber was enhanced to make it a more attractive wedding venue.

Commercial property rented/leased by the Council is managed with a view to supporting the community and its economy by providing affordable premises for local business use whilst ensuring that the premises are occupied and providing an income stream.

An Investment Working/Task & Finish Group has been created by the Council with a view to seeking and investigating the feasibility of possible new sources of income and to maximise income received from funds held in order to help offset expenses and minimise any precept increases. The group may also be tasked with reviewing the Council's sources of income with a view to establishing any potential increases.

Environment (En)

Okehampton has a strong identity and character due to its rich natural heritage. The Town Council will work to ensure this heritage is protected and enhanced for present and future generations, including those buildings and areas of land which it owns or is responsible for.

- En1 Environment (general) – the Council will actively contribute to and promote policies and initiatives that support, protect and sensitively and sustainably develop the unique historic, build and natural environments of the town

The Council, in March 2020, adopted a Tree Policy setting out how it will respond as a consultee to tree related Planning Applications within the Council boundary, or just outside thereof. The individual circumstances of each application will be considered by the Planning Committee enabling a considered response to be provided.

A community led Neighbourhood Plan is in the process of being created jointly with the neighbouring parish of Okehampton Hamlets and working with the Dartmoor National Park. The working group comprises of Members of both Councils alongside members of the public. Its aim is to ensure that future developments are fit for purpose and the area in which they are proposed whilst giving consideration to the climate, biodiversity and the environment.

The town boundary falls, in the main, just outside of Dartmoor National Park but does contribute to consultations regarding its management and takes its protected status into consideration when responding to planning applications.

Much of the town is included within a conservation area which helps to ensure that its natural environment is protected including the Council owned Charter Hall, and Town Hall which is Grade II listed.

- En2 Environment (Council ownership) – the Council will maintain and protect the heritage and natural assets in its ownership, and that it is responsible for, including through the maintenance of appropriate records, maintenance plans, inspections and works

In January 2022 the 10 year management plan for Simmons Park and Kempley Meadows was renewed by the Council. The plan is due for review on the following dates:

- i) by 31 December 2025;
- ii) by 31 December 2028;
- iii) by 31 December 2031, at which time the next ten-year management plan is to be produced.

In 2002 the formal part of Simmons Park and gardens were Grade II listed by Historic England which in turn give it enhanced protected status. In 2019 the park was awarded the 'Much Loved' status in the Fields in Trust UK Best Park awards having been placed within the top 20% of nominations across the UK.

Clapps Wood provides an area through which members of the public can take a walk. There is no specific management plan for this area of woodland, however a regular programme of inspection and maintenance is in place. In 2021 the area was replanted with native species following the felling of a significant number of the trees due to ash dieback disease

The grass verge at West Bridge which is owned and maintained by the Council is normally planted with wildflowers which, as well as creating an area welcoming those coming into the town, positively promotes biodiversity and a boost to the climate. Fairplace sensory garden was created in 2021 adding another area of insect friendly planting for the enjoyment of members of the public.

- En3 Trees – the Council will manage and maintain shrubs and trees on land which it owns or is responsible for, including the maintenance of inspection, arboricultural and planting schemes

Management of trees and shrubs within Simmons Park and Kempley Meadows is set out in the Management Plan.

Regular inspections of the trees on Council land, including Simmons Park and Clapps Wood, are undertaken by suitability qualified contractors to ensure their health and that they do not pose a risk to persons or property. Any work required is undertaken by competent persons.

- En4 Recreation – the Council will maintain, on land that it owns or is responsible for, existing areas of leisure and recreation purposes

With regards to recreation the Council owns and is responsible for Simmons Park, the skate park, BMX track and adjacent land, and Fairplace Gardens.

Simmons Park is widely used by residents, regular visitors and tourists and is maintained to a high standard providing extensive play and recreation areas. The Council is committed to maintaining all of its outdoor spaces for the enjoyment of the public.

The neighbouring Okehampton Community College use part of the land for sports as do other groups such as the Football Club, Okehampton Community Recreation Association and the Bowling Club.

The creation of a sensory garden at Fairplace and some enrichments to the Putting Green adjacent to Parklands Leisure Centre in Simmons Park were undertaken in 2021. It is hoped to enhance the old band stand base near the Chalet in Simmons Park in 2023 to add a pergola type structure that can be utilised for events such as art exhibitions or used for wedding photographs.

- En5 New Development – the Council will seek to inform and shape new development in the town to ensure sustainable and managed growth supported by the appropriate infrastructure, including working closely with the joint Okehampton Hamlets and Town Neighbourhood Development Plan.

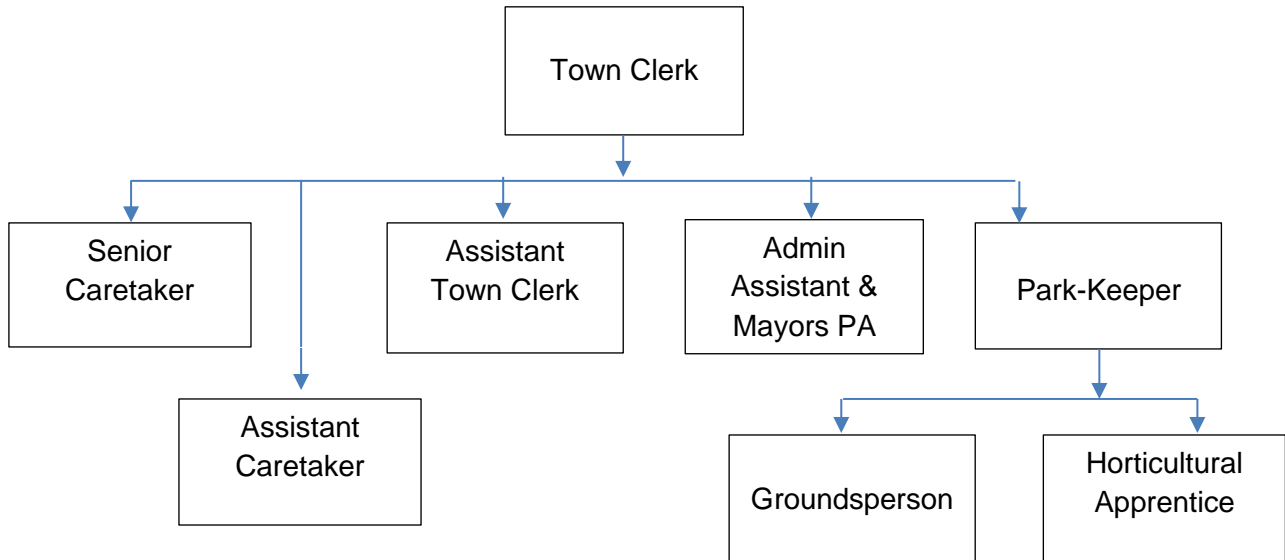
Okehampton Town Council continues to work with the community led Neighbourhood Plan Development Group which consist of members of both the Town and Hamlets Councils and members of the public who reside within the boundary of the 2 areas. It is hoped that West Devon Borough Council will assist with the production of the plan to aid its progress to completion.

The new plan must comply with planning legislation and once approved, will help to ensure that any new development fits the criteria and that new build properties are of the quality and type needed within the community. It will also help to address infrastructure to ensure that it can either cope with the increased demand or is sufficiently amended so that it is able to do so.

Workforce (W)

Staff Membership

In 2019 for the first time Okehampton Town Council resolved to employ a Horticultural Apprentice. This increased the number of employees to 8, all of whom play an important part in the efficient delivery of council services.



The Town Clerk, Park-Keeper and Apprentice are full time employees, the Apprentice being required to spend a day per week on college studies.

Management of all members of staff is the responsibility of the Town Clerk, with the Park-Keeper being the Line Manager for the other 2 members of Parks staff; the Groundsperson and Apprentice.

W1 Training and Support - the council will support employees and members to undertake their respective roles efficiently, and safely by providing them with training relevant to their requirements and to aid professional development.

Okehampton Town Council supports and encourages employee development through various means including, training and attendance at conferences and meetings that are relevant to their respective roles.

Annual development/appraisal meetings are held for all employees by their direct line manager. This is a two-way process where employees and the line manager contribute to the discussion enabling an opportunity for any concerns or issues to be raised and the identification of any training or skills that are needed.

Line management of the Town Clerk is through the Personnel Sub-Committee, although the Mayor and Chairman of the Policy & Resources Committee have delegated authority to undertake the Annual Appraisal/Performance Review and are the 'go to' nominated persons for immediate queries/concerns.

The Town Clerk promotes an open environment encouraging regular dialogue with all employees on a day to day basis, allowing concerns or issues to be discussed and dealt with as they arise.

W2 Policy – the council will follow legislation and guidance ensuring that they are a good supportive employer

Okehampton Town Council has a number of staff related policies, including those listed which are regularly reviewed and updated as part of an ongoing process or as necessary. Employees are consulted during the review process by the Town Clerk; they are provided with draft copies of policies at staff meetings which are held regularly on the first Tuesday of each month and given a timescale of at least 14 days in which to make comments or ask questions.

- Absence Management
- Bullying & Harassment
- Capability
- Disciplinary Procedure
- Discretions (Pensions)
- Equal Opportunities
- Flexible Retirement
- Grievance
- Leave
- Maternity, Paternity & Adoption
- Recruitment
- Safeguarding Policy
- Shared Parental Leave
- Social Media, IT and Phone Use Policy for Employees
- Uniform Policy for Employees

These, and other relevant policies are readily available for members of staff to access; copies being kept in the Town Hall reception and the parks office.

Councillors are supplied with copies of the National Association of Local Council's publications 'The Good Councillor's Guide' and 'Being a Good Employer' and are encouraged to attend training courses.

W3 Health & Safety - the council will ensure that it has, and keeps regularly reviewed, the necessary policies ensure the health, safety and welfare of its employees and members, and provide the necessary training and personal protective equipment.

Responsibility for Health and Safety falls to all employees, who are asked to report any issues or concerns to the Town Clerk immediately on becoming aware of them.

Risk assessments are reviewed at least annually by the Town Clerk and Park-keeper and regular inspections of equipment, buildings and safety systems is undertaken.

The safety of employees is of the utmost importance and as such a Lone Working Policy has been adopted by Okehampton Town Council. Measures are taken to address issues and concerns as they arise to ensure that employees work conditions, safety and wellbeing is prioritised.