

Okehampton Town Council

ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23

Charter Hall ready for the Mayor's Civic/Fundraising Dinner, March 2023



Contents

Page 3	Mayor's Report
Page 3	The Town Council's Responsibilities
Page 4	Parks & Open Spaces Committee
Page 5	Planning Committee
Page 5	Policy & Resources Committee
Page 6	Property Committee
Page 7	Budget for 2023/24
Page 8	Grants Awarded by the Town Council in the 2022/23 Financial Year
Page 10	Councillor Attendance at Meetings 2022/23
Page 11	Town Council Structure

May 2023 brings the elections and signals the end of the current 4-year term of office for the existing Councillors.

Because of the elections, during the pre-election period, a period of time from 23rd March up to election day, 4th May, imposes restrictions on what Councillors can say and do; this includes publishing anything that promotes them i.e. presenting grant cheques and opening events.

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.

Okehampton Town Council
Town Hall
Fore Street
Okehampton EX20 1AA

01837 53179

www.okehampton.gov.uk

Town Clerk, Emma James
Assistant Clerk (accounts), Caroline Ellis
Admin Officer and Mayor's Assistant, Abi Horn
Park-Keeper, James McGahey

townclerk@okehampton.gov.uk
accounts@okehampton.gov.uk
admin@okehampton.gov.uk
parks@okehampton.gov.uk

Mayor's Report

My report this year, due to the upcoming local elections and the period of purdah that that entails, will have to be a little restricted.

The Mayor of Okehampton is elected by the Town Council at the Annual meeting in May of each year and is Chairman of the Town Council.

As Mayor, aside from the administrative and democratic aspect of the role, they are the Civic head of the community and support all aspects of the civil and community life of Okehampton.

These will include attending, opening and supporting various local events such as the Rotary May Fair, Okehampton Show, Carnival and Edwardian evenings along with coffee mornings in support of local organisations and charities.

This year has included amongst other things the Ten Tors Challenge, recognition of the Polish Navy's part in Okehampton's recent history, the Queens Jubilee and the first anniversary of the Dartmoor Line. This year has also brought the rare duty of proclaiming the death of one Monarch and the declaration of another.

The Mayor also represents the town at neighbouring, regional and national events as the Town Councils representative. These mostly involve attending the inauguration and civic services of neighbouring Mayors, together with some of their charitable events.

During their term of office, the Mayor hosts Civic events in Okehampton such as the Civic Service, and Edwardian Evening Carols and also has a role to play at the Remembrance Day ceremony. During these occasions the Mayor is assisted by the Mayoress/Consort, the Deputy Mayor, Macebearers and the Mayor's Cadet who is chosen from the Army or Air Cadets on an alternating basis.

The Mayor also has the opportunity to host events such as Coffee Mornings, Quizzes and Charity Dinners in support of their chosen charity, this year's being Dream-a-Way.

I must apologise for the brevity of this report but I'm sure you'll appreciate our position and I hope to report more fully after the elections.

Cllr Bob Tolley
Mayor

The Town Council's Responsibilities

Okehampton Town Council is a third tier, grass roots, 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.

The council has fourteen elected councillors, comprising of eight members for the North Ward and six for the South Ward. Elections for Councillors are held four yearly, the next being this year, 4th May 2023 at the same time as the West Devon Borough Council elections. Details of who your Councillors are can be found on the Council's website.

Members of the public are welcome to attend meetings of the Council which 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. Livestreaming of full council meetings to the Council's Facebook page commenced at the very last meeting of 2022 with the aim of being more transparent about decision making. 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's Strategic Plan for the period 2019-2023 is in the process of being reviewed for 2023-2027, that being the term of the Councillors due to be elected in May. This document can be found on the website.

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
- Clapps Wood
- Skate Park and BMX track
- Wildflower verge by the bridge in West Street
- Picnic area behind Lidl
- Public toilets and garden area at Fairplace
- Public toilets in Market Street which are leased from WDBC
- Cemetery adjacent to All Saints Church

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 (Chairman)

It has been good to see the park used again for various community events. The Rotary Fair and Jubilee Celebration are just two examples of how lucky we are to be able to hold such events in the centre of the town. The Park budget still remains one of the highest. Unfortunately, being a public open space which is free for everyone to enjoy, there is little opportunity to offset the maintenance and staffing costs. The fair and other commercial events do pay, but they are few.

The committee also oversee the open spaces within the town including the cemetery. It is a statutory requirement for the Town Council to provide a burial site for the town. We are in the process of looking for a new area as the current one only has about another four to five years space remaining for burials and the Council is seeking land

for future expansion. Any suggestions or offers of land that are suitable for this use would be welcomed.

We are working with groups looking at reducing single plastic use and environmental issues. All possible green waste is made into compost and spread on the flower beds. All other waste is collected by a contractor who has a zero-landfill policy.



At last, we are able to replace a structure on the old bandstand base. We had a generous donation from a member of the public which added to our existing budget and we are now hoping a pergola will provide a venue for wedding photographs and art exhibition opportunities.

As always, we recognise the hard work carried out by our Park staff for keeping our town attractive for locals and visitors to our town

Planning Committee – Cllr Brendan Matravers (Chairman)

Each year the committee seems to have new issues to consider, mainly due to Government modelling in the Planning Legislation.

Although the Council is only a consultee when it comes to any planning application, the committee does comment, but can only stick to pure planning reasons when considering applications.

We often have applications for work on trees around the town and in the conservation area. These applications can vary from completely removing the trees, to tree surgery to make them smaller or indeed safer. The only thing that we can comment on is the individual tree's 'amenity value'. This means, if a specific tree or trees are removed or changed, would it affect the overall aesthetics of the area. In a rural area, and with more and more developments coming our way, it is important that we make sure that as many of our trees are protected with Tree Preservation Orders as possible, as the density of housing developments now means that there is no room for many of our native trees to grow and thrive.

Okehampton Town and Hamlets Parish Councils have been working together over a number of years in a community led group to progress the creation of a Neighbourhood Plan that covers the whole area. This plan went to Regulation 14 consultation in the autumn of 2022 and is now with WDBC awaiting the go-ahead to progress to the final stage. It is hoped that plan will be adopted in 2023.

Policy & Resources (P&R) Committee – Cllr Julie Yelland (Chairman)

Policy & Resources – or P&R as it is affectionately known – is made up of 10 members who are appointed by the Council in May each year. All meetings are held in public and there is always space allowed for on the agenda for members of the public to speak or ask questions at the start of each meeting. Anyone is very

welcome to come along – even if it is just to observe and see what actually happens during a Council meeting. Highly recommended if you are thinking of standing for election!

P&R is the Committee that awards grants to not for profit organisations or charities that exist to benefit the people of the town. We live in a very rural area and have a wonderful network of volunteers who give up their time, energy and skills to provide lots of different opportunities for people to come together and support and help one another. Money is always needed to run any organisation and, by providing grants, the Town Council is thrilled to be able to play some part in supporting those groups. The process for applying is straightforward and the form, together with some guidance notes, can be found at www.okehampton.gov.uk/grants.php.

P&R is responsible for setting the precept and allocating finances accordingly with the final Budget decision being made at a full Council meeting. The Committee oversees the finances of the Council and ensures that all expenditure is within the approved Budget. The precept is the amount of money that is needed to deliver all the services that are provided through the Town Council and that money is collected through the Council Tax.

P&R makes sure that all the Policies relating to the Council, its Staff and the Public are reviewed and updated as and when required. The Committee is responsible for recruitment with the Town Clerk having day to day responsibility for staff.

The Town Clerk is the “proper officer” and her role, which is very full and varied, includes being responsible for drawing up the agenda and ensuring all matters that come up for debate are within the remit of councillors and that all decisions made are legal. Training is available to Councillors to help them get to grips with the complexities of Council budgets and to ensure that they can function effectively as a Member of this Committee.

On a final note, I should like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all the Members of the Committee and our Staff who are passionate about our beautiful town and work hard to ensure the resources that are available to us are used in the best possible way for the benefit of the people of Okehampton.

Julie Yelland
Chairman
Policy & Resources Committee
March 2023

Property Committee – Cllr Ann Wood (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.

Sadly, the Property Committee cannot yet report that Charter Hall has a brand new roof and is now leak free. Unfortunately, the pandemic affected supplies of materials and prices dramatically. This has meant that we have had to review the works to ensure the project stays within an affordable budget and give best value to residents.

We anticipate that the project will be started soon and that the works will be completed without too much disruption to users of the Charter Hall. We hope to ensure that the space is available for hire in its new and updated condition without too many delays.



Despite ever increasing energy and maintenance costs Okehampton Town Council has continued to support both the Market Street (leased from West Devon Borough Council) and Fairplace (which Okehampton Town Council own) public toilets. Sadly, we have to report that vandalism still occurs occasionally in both.

Budget

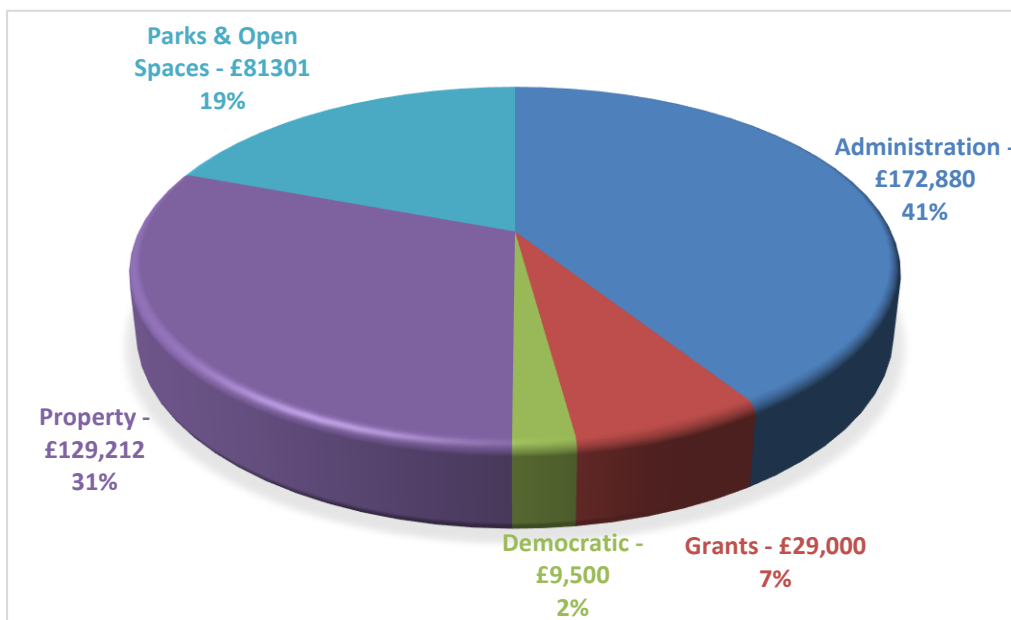
Okehampton Town Council's budget is mainly met through the precept – this is an amount that is collected for the council by WDBC as part of the town residents Council Tax bill. This pays for local services provided by the town council including the upkeep of Simmons Park, Clapps Wood, the skatepark, Town Hall and Charter Hall, public toilets, CCTV, some of the bins and benches, and the cemetery amongst other things. In 2022/23 for a Band D property the precept was £140.26, or £2.69 p/week.

Councillors have been scrutinising the budgets in preparation for the new financial year which starts on 1st April. This process started in September when budget workshops were held to review expenditure to date and to start looking at what funding might be needed for the next year. The next stage was that draft budgets based on suggestions made during the budget workshops were reviewed by the relevant Committees. Recommendations made by the Committees to Full Council were considered on 19th December when it was agreed to consult residents about the Market Street public toilets before making a final decision.

The public toilet consultation asked if Okehampton Town Council should continue to maintain the leased public toilets in Market Street at the estimated cost of £24,696 for 2023/24. As expected, the feedback was mixed, some objecting to their closure and some in agreement. Full Council considered the responses at a meeting on 30th January, this being the final stage of the 2023/24 budget and precept setting process and decided to retain them.

The Council has had the benefit of being in a three-year agreement for its insurance policies, but this is coming to an end on 31st March. Going on insurance increases experienced by other local councils, a sharp rise in this cost during the coming financial year was expected. Surprisingly the quotations were not as steep as anticipated and the council will be considering where the surplus within this budget heading can be best redirected – perhaps towards the cost of the Charter Hall roof repairs or the replacement of the Town Hall windows.

As you all know energy costs are increasing dramatically as are the costs of everything else. In order to help combat the rises, the Council will no longer be financially subsidising the Annual Mayor's Civic/Fundraising Dinner, which will now have to be self-funding, and has cut the budget for other civic events. Just to maintain the services that are currently offered the precept will have to increase, add into that the Charter Hall roofing project and the future replacement of the Town Hall windows, the council have agreed a precept of £421,893 which equates to £186.42 for a Band D property, an increase of £0.89 p/week. A breakdown of the budget showing the figures for each committee can be seen on the following chart:



There has been a small growth in the Council Tax Base (the amount of properties that the precept is split between) which will help to spread the cost slightly, although the majority of the new development is outside of the town boundary and within the surrounding Hamlets meaning that those people do not contribute towards the cost of the services in the town that are offered by the Town Council.

Grants Awarded - 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023

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>.

In 2022/23 the grant budget was £29,000 and the following grants amounting to £26,922.63 have been awarded by the Policy & Resources Committee:

Recipient Organisation	Amount of Grant (£)	Purpose
North Dartmoor Search & Rescue	500.00	Purchase of a lightweight stretcher and spinal insert
Friends of St James' Primary School	200.00	Purchase of bark chippings, topsoil and a wheelbarrow
Okehampton Table Tennis Club	500.00	Replacement of equipment; bats, nets, court surrounds and scoreboards
Museum of Dartmoor Life	3,500.00	Maintenance of the museum

Okehampton Tourist Information Point	1,500.00	Towards the running cost of the facility
Friends of Okehampton Polish Naval Camp	412.50	Purchase of a commemorative plaque
Okehampton Community Dance Project	494.00	Hall hire cost
Okey Music Day	500.00	Towards the event costs
Community Links	2,250.00	Venue hire cost for the Coffee Group
Get Changed Theatre Company	300.00	Towards the cost of a Makaton communication programme
Duke of Edinburgh Open Award Group	500.00	To cover the annual insurance premium
Okehampton Rivers Improvement Group	500.00	Renewal of Strimmer/Brushcutter training costs
Okehampton District Community Transport Group	1,000.00	Towards the running costs of the Volunteer Car Service
Well-Being Café	500.00	For the development of resources and delivery of support and services
Wren Music	200.00	Towards the provision of a family friendly music day
Meldon Viaduct	500.00	Towards the maintenance and renewal fund
Citizens Advice	5,000.00	Towards recruitment and training of three additional volunteers for the Okehampton area
Okehampton Carnival Committee	500.00	Towards the event costs
Immersion in the Community CIC	500.00	Towards the purchase of a pool table for community use
Royal British Legion	50.00	Poppy Wreath
Okehampton United Ecclesiastical Charity	750.00	Towards the ongoing maintenance of the Town Clock and its chimes
Everything Okehampton	2,000.00	Towards the cost of new security bolts and wires for the Christmas lights, their erection and taking down
Okehampton Fairtrade Group	140.00	Towards the hosting of an event during Fairtrade Fortnight 2023
Okehampton United Charity	1,988.63	Allotment running and maintenance cost
1 st Okehampton Scout Group	237.50	Towards the purchase of smoke alarms, heat detector and PAT testing for the scout hut
Daisi	200.00	Towards the wellbeing project from April 2023 to August 2024
Okehampton Friendly Circle	500.00	Towards the cost of a coach for the yearly outing and entrance fees
Okehampton Primary School	100.00	To cover the purchase of a tree, plants and compost in celebration of the Coronation of King Charles III
Okehampton Community Recreation Association	1,600.00	Towards the Charter/Fields in Trust Celebrations in July 2023, Sports Week and work towards the Open Space, Sport and Recreation Plan

The grant process is changing from 1st April 2023. This is primarily to ensure that all applicants are treated fairly and given the same opportunity without the risk of those who apply late in the financial year being affected by a diminished budget.

Details of the changes, new policy and application form can be found on the website.

Councillor Attendance at Meetings 2022/23

11th May 2022 to 27th March 2023

	Full Council (12)	Committees				Total	Possible Attendance	Percentage %
		P & R (6)	Planning (8)	Parks (5)	Property (6)			
Cllr Tolley	12	6	8	3	6	35	37	94.59
Cllr Marsh	11	6	3	5	5	30	33	90.90
Cllr Matravers	11	5	8	1	2	27	30	90.00
Cllr Yelland	12	6	6	4	5	33	37	89.19
Cllr Wood	6	3	3	2	4	18	37	48.65
Cllr Holt	10	X	X	5	5	20	23	86.96
Cllr Ireland	12	X	6	4	X	22	25	88.00
Cllr Goffey	7	X	7	X	4	18	26	69.23
Cllr Leech	8	X	X	3	5	16	22	72.73

Councillors who have been co-opted during the year:

	Full Council	Committees				Total	Possible Attendance	Percentage %
		P & R	Planning	Parks	Property			
Cllr Botton (January 2023)	2	2	3	X	X	7	8	87.50
Cllr Fisher (September 2022)	5	4	x	X	4	13	14	92.76

Councillors who have resigned during the year:

	Full Council	Committees				Total	Possible Attendance	Percentage %
		P & R	Planning	Parks	Property			
Cllr Abbots (May 22-Feb 23)	9	X	4	4	X	17	20	85
Cllr Button (May 22- July 22)	3	0	0	0	0	3	10	30
Cllr Jessop (May 22 – Oct 22)	6	2	2	3	1	13	16	81.25
Cllr Sanger (May 22 – Oct 22)	6	2	X	X	1	9	10	90
Cllr Travers (May 22 – Sept 22)	4	2	X	2	X	8	9	88.88

Key

Numbers in () = number of meetings held

P&R = Policy & Resources

X = Not a member of that Committee

Town Council Structure

