

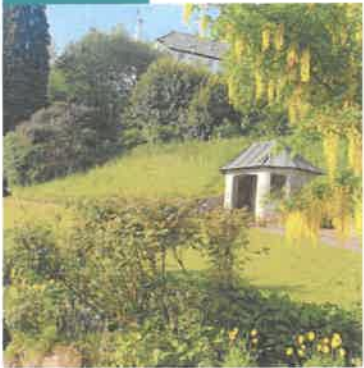


Okehampton Town Council

# ANNUAL REPORT

2023-  
2024

Okehampton Town Council



Okehampton Town Council, Town Hall, Fore Street  
Okehampton, EX20 1AA  
01837 53179 [www.okehampton.gov.uk](http://www.okehampton.gov.uk)

## 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.



**Town Clerk, Emma James [townclerk@okehampton.gov.uk](mailto:townclerk@okehampton.gov.uk)**

**Assistant Clerk (accounts), Caroline Ellis [accounts@okehampton.gov.uk](mailto:accounts@okehampton.gov.uk)**

**Admin Officer and Mayor's Assistant, Abi Horn [admin@okehampton.gov.uk](mailto:admin@okehampton.gov.uk)**

**Park-Keeper, James McGahey [parks@okehampton.gov.uk](mailto:parks@okehampton.gov.uk)**

# **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 last being on 4th May 2023, at the same time as the West Devon Borough Council elections. Details of who your councillors are can be found overleaf and 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. 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).**

**Livestreaming of full council meetings to the Council's Facebook page commenced at the end of 2022 and expanded to meetings of the committees in 2023. This has made public accessibility to meetings easier and increases the transparency of decision making throughout the work of the Council.**

**The Council's Strategic Plan for the period 2023-2027 was reviewed last year and 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 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.**

# MEET OKEHAMPTON'S TOWN COUNCILLORS



Allenton Fisher  
Mayor



Carole Holt  
Chair of Parks



Tony Leech  
Chair of Planning



Julie Yelland  
Chair of P&R



Richard Colman  
Chair of Property



Laura Bird



Terry Cummings



Michael Ireland



Christine Marsh  
Deputy Mayor



Mark Richards



Lynne Rogers



Bob Tolley



Simon Weekes



Vacancy

Okehampton Town  
Council  
Town Hall  
Fore Street  
Okehampton  
EX20 1AA  
01837 53179



# **MAYOR'S REPORT- CLLR ALLENTON FISHER MBE**

**It has been an absolute pleasure and delight to have had the honour of being the mayor of our fantastic town. I have been lucky enough to have been invited to many Devon town events from as far north as Barnstaple and south to Plymouth. With my wife as Mayoress we have also been getting to know a lot better our neighbouring town of Launceston**

**Okehampton had its first open public meeting for several years to discuss the parking proposals suggested by DCC. There is no doubt that nearly every resident was against the parking meters with a second hour of parking in and around the Kempley Road/ Park Row area. We let DCC know the feelings and they have thankfully decided to axe the proposal.**

**Our relationship with The Hamlets Parish Council remains very good and this past year we have worked together on many aspects and are doing so again for the D Day Commemoration in June.**

**I have been amazed at how many large and small groups there are in our great town, and it was my intention to visit them all. Due to the amount and the variety, I have not completely achieved my aim but thank all the organizers of these groups for the wonderful work they do. If you want to be involved or just have company, then there is something for everybody. From the Squirrels (which is the junior group of the Scout movement) to the Memory Cafe there is so much enthusiasm and joy**

**The normal annual events took place as usual, but this was crowned by an amazing Party in The Park to celebrate the 400 years of Okehampton's Town Charter. This was combined with 150 years of Okehampton United Charities and 125 years of Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council. The event was held in our lovely Simmons Park and as well as many many stalls we had Wren Music Choirs, the Okehampton Excelsior Silver Band playing and OCRA organizing many sports and games for children. I have never seen so many people in the park, and it once again showed the extremely strong community spirit in the town. Celebration cakes were cut in the marquee which also showcased the timeline of the 400 years. The timeline will be displayed in the Charter Hall when the renovation of the building is complete.**

**The town has seen a considerable increase in numbers as our railway link to Exeter continues to grow. Having been on this track many times and attended the second-year celebration of it, I know that the figures that GWR forecasted to use the line have more than doubled their expectations. Our second station, which is now in the process of being built and will hopefully be named "Okehampton Parkway" will again be a boost to our economy and ease the parking issues on Station Road**

## **Parks & Open Spaces Committee – Cllr Carole Holt (Chairman)**

**We are lucky to have such a lovely park covering several acres tended to by the dedicated Town Council parks staff. Visitors and residents can enjoy walking with their dog or children around the park on the various footpaths. Many picnics are enjoyed in Simmons Park during the course of the year. The leisure centre on the edge of the park has a newly opened cafe for those who need refreshments as well as the Pavilion in the Park run by OCRA.**

**During the year the fair comes to Simmons Park twice giving enjoyment to all ages. The Rotary Club hold their annual fair in the park with duck racing down the East Okement river, a very popular event. The 400-year celebration of Okehampton's Charter was held in the park with a huge variety of stalls and activities as well as the timeline showing the changes in Okehampton over the period. The timeline will be hung in the Charter Hall once it reopens later in the year following major roofing work.**

**A new pergola has been erected on the old bandstand plinth near Chalet Treloar. An upgrade to the planting around the edge is underway with plants that are favourites of the Royal Family.**

**The children's play area has seen some new pieces of equipment in the last year, and kindly paid for by Okehampton United Charities, a new play tractor will be coming to the park in 2024.**

**The Simmons Park volunteer group is growing, helping the parks team keep on top of weeding and pruning. Jacob, the park's apprentice is leading this group as part of his course work with supervision by the Park Keeper.**

## **Parks Volunteer Group- Jacob Peek (Parks Apprentice)**

**This last year has been a great experience for the parks team as we received assistance from the general public. The group of 11 volunteers have aided the park staff by upping the maintenance levels of the formal areas of the park. They have managed to clear beds that would usually take us a full day to complete in one session. This allows us to have more time to focus on larger projects and tasks that require the full attention of the main parks staff.**



**This allows the grounds team to further accomplish the council's green goals and management plan. It is great to get the community involved with work in the park as it spreads awareness of what is happening in their park and it shows the public what is living on their doorstep. I hope that when it becomes more regular, we can get more people from all ages involved and help spread awareness of how to maintain green areas and how to treat their eco spaces at home.**

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

**Local Town and Parish Council planning committees have to be viewed within the context of the national planning framework for England and Wales.**

**Town and Parish Council planning committees act as review bodies for planning applications affecting the area within their boundaries. Councils may also express their views on planning applications in neighbouring parishes which might have an impact on them.**

**The Okehampton Town Council Planning Committee acts as a review body and makes its recommendation to West Devon Borough Council (WDBC). The Town Council has limited powers with regard to planning and can only put forward three possible courses of action to WDBC; these are to support, object or express a neutral view on an application. In addition, brief statements can be attached explaining the rationale for the committee's view.**

**WDBC make the final decision and can either accept or disregard the committee's views. The decisions made by WDBC are noted by the committee and discussed.**

**The environment is an increasingly important area of concern for the Planning Committee. For example, the impact of planning applications on trees, plants, watercourses, and the habitats of wild animals.**

**The committee will also give its views on transport including road and rail networks affecting the town. We welcome correspondence from members of the public on transport related issues.**





## **Property Committee – Cllr Richard Colman (Chairman)**

**The committee's responsibilities rest with the properties that the Council own and lease. These include the Town Hall, Charter Hall, the buildings in Market Steet encompassing offices, shops, and the Cinema.**

**We are also responsible for the upkeep of the public toilets in the town. The Council own the toilets in Fairplace and lease the Market Street toilets from West Devon Borough Council.**

**Works started on the Charter Hall roof in Mid-February and are expected to be completed in Mid -July. These works will incorporate a new air handling unit. It is hoped some internal improvements will take place before the Hall reopens in September.**

**The Charter Hall working group is looking at feedback from users as well as its own ideas on freshening up the Charter Hall and improving the experience for hirers. It is hoped to make changes in the kitchen as well as making sure it complies with current fire regulations.**

**There are other projects in waiting including replacing the windows in the Grade II listed Town Hall which being in a conservation zone is not a straight forward job.**



### **Charter Hall Roofing Work and Closure**

**Major repair work to the roof of the Charter Hall commenced in February, with anticipated completion being July.**

**The work includes the re-slating of the entire roof of the hall, re-roofing of the adjoining flat roof of the chair and table storeroom and replacement of the ventilation system unit and ducting.**

**Following completion of the roofing work some internal maintenance work to the hall will take place. The Charter Hall is planned to reopen in September 2024.**

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

**The Policy & Resources Committee meets six times throughout the year and responds to funding applications twice a year in June and November. There is £29,000 set aside in the annual Budget which enables the Council to give grants to local charities and not for profit organisations who support and provide services within our local community.**

**The Budget setting process starts in August with all members being invited to workshops where a draft budget is scrutinised on a line-by-line basis. This process enables all Councillors to put forward ideas for improving efficiencies and it is at this point any unbudgeted new projects that have previously been formally agreed are included. Over the following five months, each Committee has opportunity to debate its own budget at least twice before the final version finally arrives with Policy & Resources in January where it is reviewed once again and a recommendation is made to Full Council.**

**The Council is an employer with all the associated responsibilities that go along with that and staffing matters sit within Policy & Resources. The Committee regularly reviews and refreshes the Council policies to ensure they remain legally compliant, relevant and fit for purpose. There are the usual policies that specifically relate to staff which any responsible employer should adopt together with policies that ensure the Council is transparent and fair in its dealings with members of the public. All are freely available on the Town Council website.**

**I remain, as ever, grateful to the members of the Committee for their hard work in reading copious amounts of paperwork, preparing for the meetings and turning up. We are very fortunate to have a dedicated, well qualified, team of staff who care deeply about Okehampton and are enthusiastic about the services that the Council delivers. Thank you!**

# **Community Governance Boundary Review**

**The review to amend the boundary between the Town and Hamlets Parish Councils was undertaken following a petition instigated by the Town Council on behalf of its residents. The aim was to change the boundary to incorporate the urban developments into the town, enabling those residents to feel included in the community many already believe they are part of. This will bring a sense of community cohesion and identity and give them a democratic voice in the town.**

**We are however conscious that the decision was not the outcome hoped for by Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council. Okehampton Town Council will be delighted to continue working with the Hamlets Parish Council in holding joint events and projects for the benefit of all residents and, if approved, working collaboratively towards a smooth boundary transition, going forward.**

**The outcome of WDBC's decision is as follows:**

- 1. That the existing parish boundaries of Okehampton Town Council and Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council be amended in line with the petition submitted by the Town Council**
- 2. That the Council strongly encourages the Town and Parish Council to work more closely together for the benefit of their local communities.**

**The review will be formally completed when WDBC publishes the Reorganisation of Community Governance Order and requests that the Electoral Commission approve any changes.**

**The main dates, as known to us at this time are as follows, but what this means exactly has yet to be ascertained:**

**1 April 2025 administrative and financial processes will start to change**

**May 2027 it is understood that in line with the next local council elections in 2027, the Town Council will increase in size from 14 Town Councillors to 15**

**Full details of the process for the change have yet to be received and worked out, as has the transition process. The Town Council will endeavour to keep both its existing and new residents as fully informed as possible throughout the period of change.**

# 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 skate park, Town Hall and Charter Hall, public toilets, CCTV, some of the bins and benches, and the cemetery amongst other things. In 2023/24 for a Band D property the precept was £186.42, or £3.86 p/week.

The budgeting process started in early autumn when budget workshops were held to review expenditure to date and to start looking at what funding might be needed for the next year. Each budget line was scrutinized and suggestions including budget cuts made during the workshops were considered by the relevant Committees who then made recommendations to Full Council.

Full Council considered recommendations from the Committees at a meeting on 18th December 2023 and again on 22nd January 2024, this being the final stage of the 2024/25 budget and precept setting process.

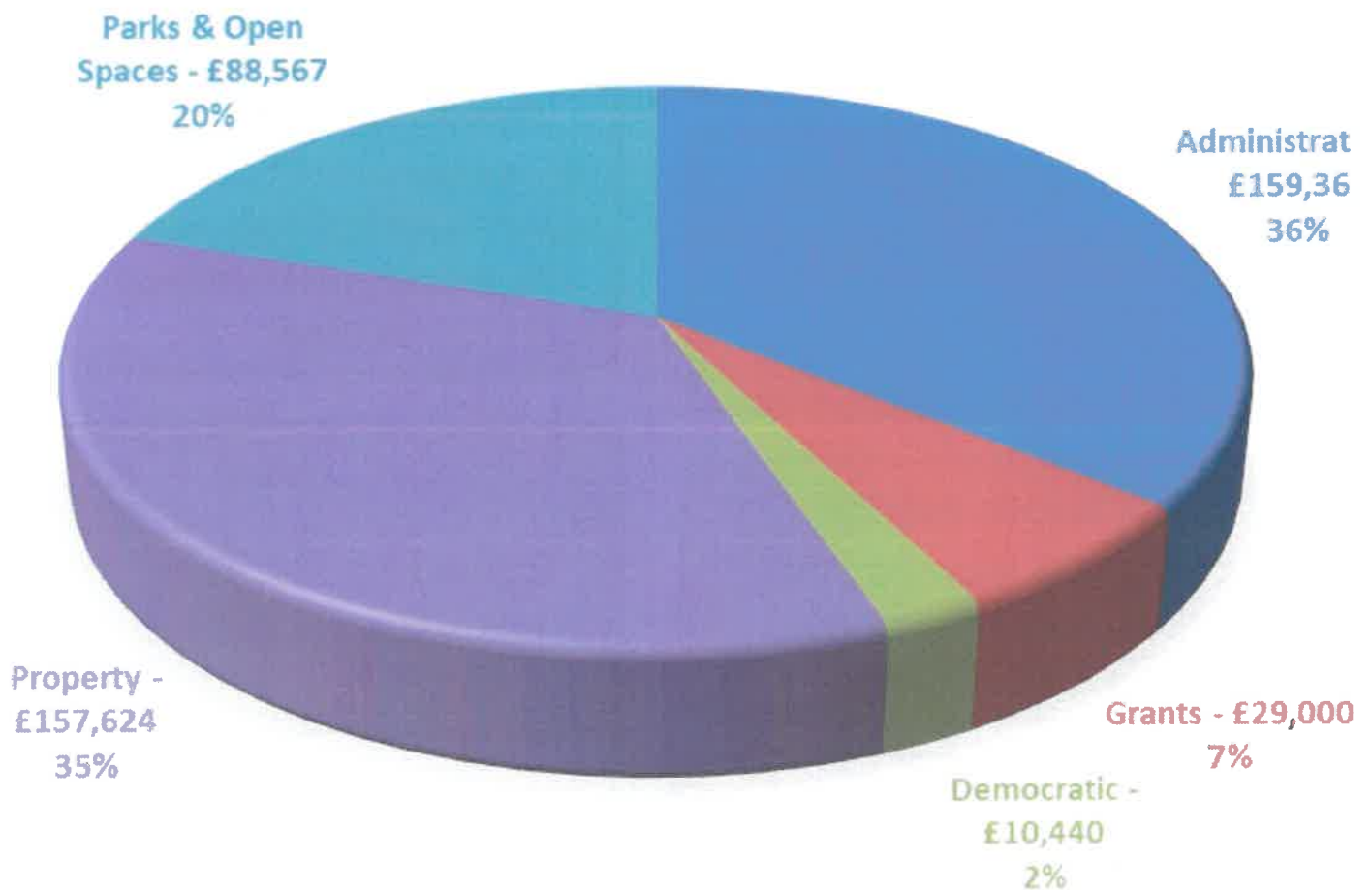
There has been a decrease of 2.5% in the Council Tax Base for the town (the amount of properties that the precept is split between) meaning that there are less town residents to share the cost between.

Two large costs are looming for the Town Council; major repairs and improvements to the Charter Hall Roof, the contract cost for which is in excess of £450,000, and in the not too distant future repair or replacement of the Grade II listed Town Hall windows.



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 £444,996 which equates to £196.85 for a Band D property, an increase of £0.20 p/week.

A breakdown of the budget showing the figures for each committee can be seen on the following chart:



## Grants Awarded - 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024

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 2023/24 the grant budget was £29,000 and the following grants amounting to £21,942.20 have been awarded by the Policy & Resources Committee:

### Okey Music Day

£500 towards the costs of the event

### Okehampton Carnival

£1,000 towards the cost of the event

### Citizens Advice

£5,000 towards the continued work in Okehampton.

### Wren Music

£500 towards events celebrating Wren Music's 40th Anniversary.

### Museum of Dartmoor Life and Tourist Information Facility

£3,500 towards the maintenance of the museum and £1,500 to assist with the running of the tourist information facility

### Tor Support

£3,000 to fund 60 counselling sessions

### Okehampton Excelsior Silver Band

£490 for the purchase of Carol books and music folders.





**Okehampton United Ecclesiastical Charity**

**£500 towards the upkeep of the Town Clock**

**Poppy Appeal 2023**

**£50 for a wreath for the 2023 Remembrance Service.**

**Okehampton Friendship Group**

**£300 towards the cost of room hire and light refreshments.**

**Friends of Okehampton Library**

**£320 towards the provision of a Book Festival.**

**Meldon Viaduct Trust**

**£500 towards the essential repairs and maintenance fund.**

**Everything Okehampton**

**£1,400 as a third contribution towards the Celebrations in the Park in July 2023 and £2,000 towards the cost of the Christmas light erection and dismantling.**

**Simmons Bowling Club**

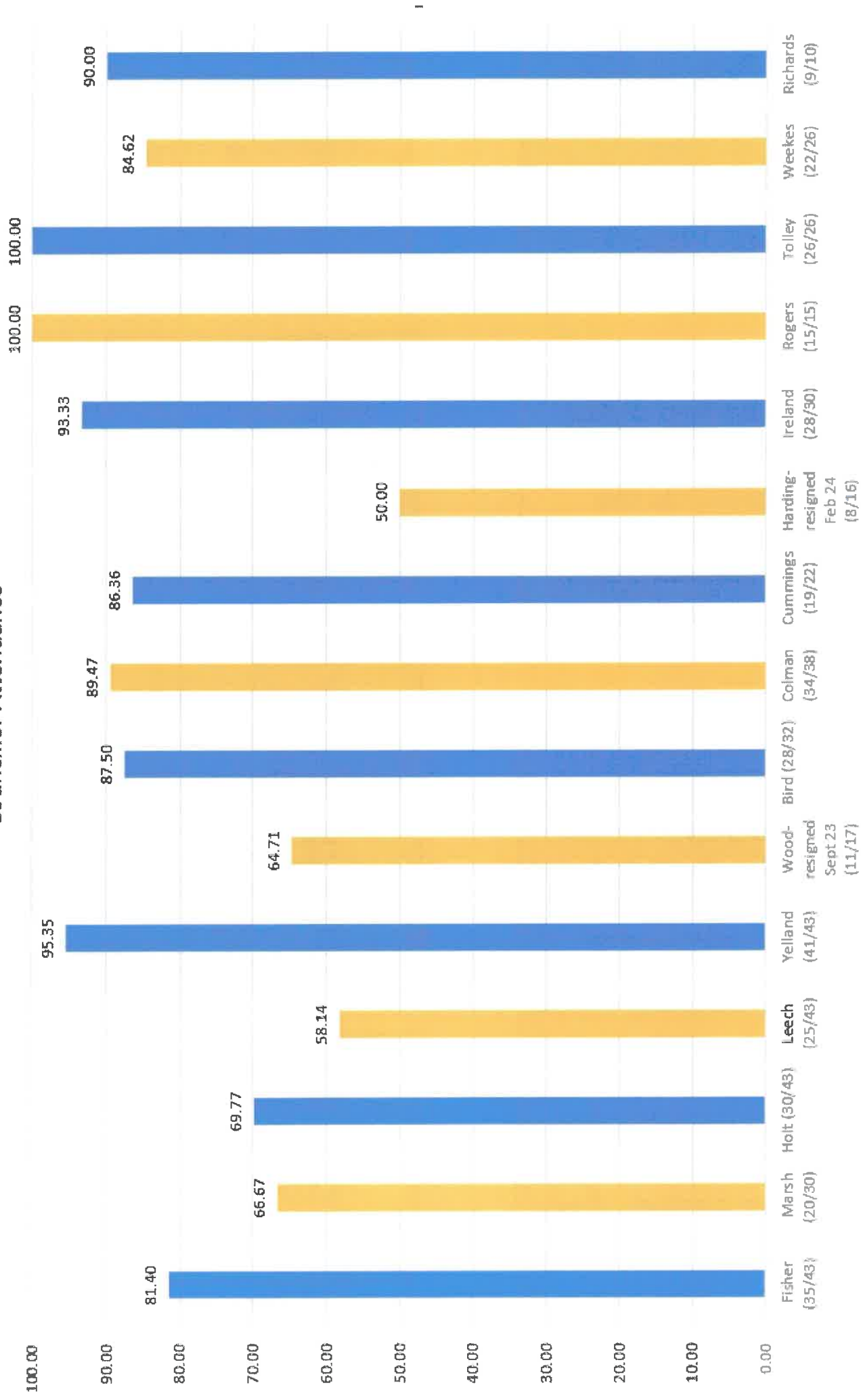
**£382.20 towards the cost of a countertop glasswasher.**

**Okehampton District Community Transport Group**

**£1,000 towards continuation of the service**



# Councillor Attendance



Number in () denotes number of meetings attended/ number of meetings required to attend