

**Minutes of a meeting of Okehampton Town Council held on
Monday 31st March 2025 at 7pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Okehampton**

Members Present: Councillor A Fisher (Mayor)
Councillor T Leech (Chairman, Planning Committee)
Councillor B Tolley (Chairman, Parks Committee)
Councillor L Bird
Councillor T Cummings
Councillor F Hart
Councillor C Holt
Councillor M Ireland
Councillor C Marsh
Councillor D McNeill
Councillor M Richards
Councillor S Weekes
Councillor J Yelland

In Attendance: Mrs E James (Clerk)
Cllr G Dexter (WDBC)
Cllr L Samuel (DCC)

Action

- 689 Apologies for Absence** – On the proposition of Cllr Bird, seconded Cllr Ireland, it was **RESOLVED** to approve apologies tendered by Cllr Colman (health).
- 690 Declarations of Interest** – Cllr Richards declared a pecuniary interest in relation to Minute Ref 699.2.
- 691 Public Participation** – None
- 692 Members Questions** – Cllr McNeill queried where people from Ukrainian could obtain support. To be referred to WDBC through Cllr Leech.
- 693 West Devon Borough Council** – Reports from Cllrs Leech and Dexter had been previously circulated.
- Cllr Dexter reported on the recently approved Public Space Protection Order in Okehampton which related to alcohol consumption in open public spaces.
- Cllr Leech provided an update on his initial report circulated earlier in the month and in relation to the report circulated earlier in the day. It was suggested the Youth Council might be interested in the Rural Media presentations.
- 694 Devon County Council** – A report from Cllr Samuel had been circulated. DCC had submitted various options for the creation of Devon unitary councils to the government. Public consultation in relation to this was expected in the summer.
- 695 Questions Arising from Members Reports** – None
- 696 Adoption of Minutes of Committees and to Receive Questions from Members Thereon**
- 696.1** On the proposition of Cllr Yelland, seconded Cllr Hart, it was **RESOLVED** to adopt the minutes of the **Policy & Resources Committee** meetings held on 6th and 20th January 2025.
- 696.2** On the proposition of Cllr Tolley, seconded Cllr Marsh, it was **RESOLVED** to adopt the minutes of the **Parks Committee** meeting held on 9th December 2024.

697 **Full Council Meeting Minutes** – The minutes of the Town Council meetings held on 24th February and 17th March 2025 were **approved** on the proposition of Cllr Fisher, seconded by Cllr Cummings, and signed by the Mayor.

698 **Devolution White Paper** – On the proposition of Cllr Fisher, seconded Cllr Hart, it was **RESOLVED** to request a meeting with WDBC to review assets and services.

Clerk

699 **Meetings, Projects and Consultations**

699.1 **Community Governance Boundary Review** – A joint meeting with WDBC and Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council had taken place on Wednesday 12th March 2025. A list of the assets that would be transferred to the Town Council to be requested.

Clerk

699.2 **Pulse Hub Update** – A pre-app for planning advice had been submitted.

(Cllr Richards, who had declared a pecuniary interest in this item was requested to leave the meeting in accordance with council policy)

On the proposition of Cllr Fisher, seconded Cllr Yelland, it was **RESOLVED** to ask the BID if they would be interested in becoming the gatekeeper for the Okehampton Scheme. If not, the Council would take on this role.

Clerk

(Cllr Richards returned)

699.3 **Public Space Protection Order** – A PSPO designed to assist in the prevention of problems arising from excessive drinking within Okehampton had been approved by WDBC.

700 **Neighbourhood Plan** – A response from a request to Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council for permission to include the land due to transfer to the Town Council in 2027 as identified in the Boundary Review was awaited.

701 **Finance and Governance**

701.1 **Payments** – Cllrs Marsh and Ireland declared personal interests in relation to a payment to Okehampton United Charities.

On the proposition of Cllr Yelland, seconded Cllr Weekes, (2 abstentions) it was **RESOLVED** to approve the schedule of payments (BACS payments totalling £1,960.75) and those authorised by Cllrs Yelland and Ireland the previous week when there had not been a Council or Committee meeting (BACS payments totalling £6,654.79).

The Clerk reported that a BACS payment to DCC for the March pension contributions in the sum of £3,666.21, authorised by the Policy & Resources Committee on 17th March 2025, had not left the Council's bank account. As advised by the bank, the payment had been re-processed earlier in the day.

701.2 **Effectiveness of Internal Controls** – A report from the Policy & Resources Committee following a review of the effectiveness of the council's internal controls was considered. On the proposition of Cllr Yelland, seconded Cllr Bird, it was **RESOLVED** to approve the report.

701.3 **2024/25 Internal Audit** – The internal audit report dated 5th March 2025, observations made, and actions taken to address them were considered and **agreed**. Observations relating to the Asset Register would be considered later in the meeting. The final internal audit for 2024/25 would be completed following the year-end financial closedown.

<p>701.4 Asset Register – On the proposition of Cllr Marsh, seconded Cllr Ireland, it was RESOLVED to defer the item to Part 2 because of matters that could affect leases.</p>	
<p>701.5 2025/26 Meeting Schedule - On the proposition of Cllr Marsh, seconded Cllr Ireland, it was RESOLVED to approve the schedule of meeting and event dates for the 2025/26 Mayoral year.</p>	Clerk
<p>701.6 Peer Review – It was noted that NALC would not undertake corporate peer challenges for councils who were not a member of their super-council network (precept of over £1m or annual turnover of over £1.5m) or had achieved Gold Status in the Local Council Award Scheme. Consideration of other ways of conducting a peer review to be actioned in due course.</p>	
<p>701.7 Action Plan – Suggestions from Councillors for achievable items to be included in an annual action plan for the 2025/26 mayoral year to be invited.</p>	Clerk
<p>702 <u>Policies and Documents</u></p>	
<p>702.1 Policies - On the proposition of Cllr Yelland, seconded Cllr Weekes, it was RESOLVED to approve the following documents as recommended by the Policy & Resources Committee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Civic/Council Protocol b) Delegation Scheme c) Internal Control Statement 	Clerk
<p>702.2 Committee Terms of Reference – On the proposition of Cllr Marsh, seconded Cllr Tolley, it was RESOLVED to approve the following Terms of Reference for the 2025/26 Mayoral Year, as recommended by the relevant committees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Property Committee b) Parks Committee c) Planning Committee d) Policy & Resources (P&R) Committee e) Personnel Sub-Committee (reports to P&R) 	Clerk
<p>702.3 Working Group Terms of Reference – On the proposition of Cllr Weekes, seconded Cllr Hart, it was RESOLVED to approve a generic ToR covering all groups. Should a Neighbourhood Plan go ahead, a separate ToR would be required.</p>	Clerk
<p>703 <u>Civic</u></p>	
<p>703.1 Mayors Civic Diary Report – Cllr Fisher had attended various events including the RAF Cadets and Library Coffee Mornings, Inner Wheel and Singing for Wellness, 2nd Birthday of Memory Café, Museum opening. Friendly Circle and Plastic Free meetings, Pancakes with the Army Cadets, Street Pastors Service, Commonwealth Day, Barnstaple and Plymouth Civic Services and South Molton Civic play.</p>	
<p>703.2 Mayor’s Cadet – The Devon Army Cadet Force was no longer supporting the appointment of a Mayor’s Cadet. The Clerk had written to the Devon Commanding Officer requesting a review of the decision. The cadet for the 2025/26 Mayoral Year would be appointed by the Air Cadet Force.</p>	
<p>704 <u>Reports of Council working/Task & Finish Groups:</u></p>	
<p>704.1 Climate Change – A meeting had been held on 19th March, notes from which had been circulated.</p>	
<p>(Cllr Holt left the meeting)</p>	

705 Council External Representatives

705.1 Review – Groups and organisations who had a nominated council representative were being requested to reaffirm their requirement prior to the Nominations Meeting in April.

705.2 Twinning Association – A request from Cllr Weekes to be appointed representative to the Twinning Association was deferred until a full review of all appointments was undertaken in May.

706 Reports on Current Activities by Community Groups with Town Council Representation

706.1 Neighbourhood Plan Group – Refer to Minute Ref 700, above.

707 Members' Reports and Items for Agendas

707.1 DCC Regeneration Board – The most recent meeting had been on 4th March. The next step was to review the overall strategy, date to be agreed.

707.2 Business Improvement District – Cllr Tolley had circulated the March newsletter. Meet the Board sessions had been held, a representation from the BID would be doing a presentation at the Annual Town Assembly, and interviews for the BID Manager vacancy had been held.

707.3 Okehampton Community Hospital – No report.

707.4 Rural Market Town Group – Cllr Leech had not been able to attend the last meeting, information had been circulated.

707.5 Transition Town Okehampton – Cllr Cummings reported on meetings and events held and attended, including a seed and plant exchange, a community lunch and an emergency plan event.

(Cllrs Dexter and Samuel left the meeting)

708 PART TWO – CONFIDENTIAL

On the proposition of Cllr Ireland, seconded Cllr Yelland it was RESOLVED that under section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 that the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items which are CONFIDENTIAL by virtue of relating to legal and/or commercial matters, staffing and/or the financial or business affairs of a person or persons other than the Council.

709 Market Street Office Refurbishment - On the proposition of Cllr Yelland, seconded Cllr Hart, it was **RESOLVED** to request a breakdown of costs for the quotation received.

Clerk

710 Riverbank Repair Tender – On the proposition of Cllr Marsh, seconded Cllr Hart, it was **RESOLVED** to approve the following recommendations from the Parks Committee:

- a) Acceptance of a tender in the sum of £41,820 from A D Williams Building Contractors Ltd
- b) Virement of £22,000 from general reserves to a budget for riverbank repairs

Clerk/
Finance
Officer

711 Simmons Park Charity and Leases – An update from Solicitors, Trustees and leases was considered, including in relation to land ownership. A Trustees meeting was required to consider a document prepared by the Solicitor.

Clerk

712 Asset Register – The asset register, including additions (£30,637) and disposals (£44,129) as listed on the report was considered along with land ownership clarification received from Solicitors and an observation raised by the Internal Auditor.

On the proposition of Cllr Marsh, seconded Cllr Weekes, it was **RESOLVED** to approve:

- a) Additions of £30,639, including acceptance of land at Simmons Park
- b) Disposals of £44,129
- c) The asset register as at 31st March 2025 totalling £8,886,289

Clerk

713 **Heritage** – A report from Cllr Leech about the possible closure of Okehampton Castle, which was outside of the town boundary and within that of Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council, was considered. Cllr Ireland advised he had been handed a petition, addressed to English Heritage, objecting to closure of the castle from a member of the public.

It was **RESOLVED** to suspend Standing Order 3 (bb) to permit extension of the meeting following a proposal by Cllr Ireland, seconded Cllr Bird.

On the proposition of Cllr Yelland, seconded Cllr Hart, it was **RESOLVED** the Clerk write to:

- a) Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council to ascertain if they would like the petition to be passed to them or if the town council should forward it to English Heritage and seeking to work with them to challenge the decision.
- b) English Heritage seeking clarification of the situation, emphasising the impact on tourism and the local economy and questioning why local authorities had not been consulted.

Clerk

On the proposition of Cllr Ireland, seconded Cllr Leech, it was **RESOLVED** to exit Part 2 and ratify decisions made therein. The meeting was closed at 8.37pm.

Councillor Fisher, Mayor