



Okehampton Town Council

Annual Report 2024/25



The Mayor of Okehampton **Cllr Allenton Fisher**

2024 has been another excellent year for our wonderful town. There have been many outstanding events. I obviously cannot name them all but the opening of The Inspiration Church in Crediton Road, a brilliant turnout for Remembrance Day, an excellent town carnival, the 3rd anniversary of our trainline to Exeter, excellent concerts by our wonderful town band and of course the continued enhancement of our wonderful park to mention a few.

Jean and I have again been out and about around the county telling everybody who would listen how great Okehampton is. This year the word has spread further as we have been invited to many Cornish Civic events which include Fowey, Lostwithiel, Wadebridge, Saltash and of course our near neighbour Launceston.

Over the past 12 months I have been to more coffee mornings than there are Saturdays in the year. However, I really think that they are a very large part of building a strong community and I urge those who do not yet frequent them to consider popping into one of them, there is no cost. There are coffee mornings most Saturdays in the Charter Hall, every Saturday in Fairplace and many Saturdays in the All-Saints Parish Hall in Market Street. The better we know each other the better the town can operate and go forward and with many new families coming into town this is very important.

We are very fortunate to have excellent Air and Army cadet units in town and following them our Scouts, Guides, Brownies and Cubs etc are extremely impressive groups. The turnout of all of them for Remembrance Day was outstanding and the numbers this year I think exceeded everybody's expectation

The BID (Business Improvement District) is now up and running and will undoubtedly enhance the town. The BID is expected to see £650,000 raised over five years for improvements to help boost the economy. This is great news for all of us.

During my second year as Mayor, I have again been supporting Hospiscare. I am sure you are all aware that hospices throughout the country are struggling for funds, so I am extremely grateful for the support you have given the charity this year.

During my visits around the county and into Cornwall I have been telling everybody that Okehampton is

THE TOWN CENTRE OF DEVON

And I will continue to promote our lovely town long after I have completed my time as your Mayor

Property Committee **Cllr Richard Colman - Chairman**

The Property Committee has been actively managing and maintaining the Council's properties, addressing both ongoing projects and new initiatives. Below are the highlights of their recent work:

Charter Hall Improvements:

- The roofing project and internal upgrades were completed by mid-August 2024, anti-climb paint was applied to prevent unauthorised access to certain areas.
- Efforts were made to enhance the aesthetic appeal, including stage boarding improvements and the generous donation of stage and window curtains. The 400-year Charter Celebration timeline is now on display in the Charter Hall with a few copies still available in the Town Hall to purchase.



Fire Safety:

- o The Committee is addressing fire safety compliance by commissioning new risk assessments, fire door surveys, and has developed a phased rectification plan.

Window Maintenance:

- o The condition of all windows including the Grade II Listed Town Hall is being addressed and planning consent sought.

The Committee is focusing on property maintenance and compliance with safety regulations, and forward-looking financial planning to ensure sustainable management of Council assets.

Planning Committee

Cllr Tony Leech - Chairman

Firstly, I must make it clear that the Planning Committee for the Town Council is just a consultee. All the decisions are made by West Devon Borough Council (WDBC) as they are the official planning authority. However, the towns planning committee can debate applications based on national as well as WDBC policies that have very specific criteria, which we can comment on. The decisions are determined by voting: Support, Object or having a neutral view on applications.

There are, however, big changes that have recently come into force. The Government has made immediate changes to what is called the NPPF (The National Planning Policy Framework). The changes will involve mainly the larger developments, but does mean that any decision, although still based on the policies in place at the time, have a “tilted” balance towards agreeing to developments going forward. To turn down any development, any planning committee will have to show that the development has a **significantly and demonstrable** “tilt” against it. This could be much harder from now on. The WDBC Joint Local Plan (JLP) will also have to be updated to cover the changes. It is still unclear if the JLP can be reused/updated or if each Authority will

have to produce their own individual plans. Whichever it is, it/they will have to be completed very quickly.

Over the years, Governments have changed the rules on planning, and now there are a raft of works that do not need planning permission and are now covered under “Permitted Development”. Shops can be changed into dwellings and vice-versa. Shops can be opened up on land usually earmarked for industrial estates, and house owners can do a lot to their houses without having planning consent. They do, however have to comply with the current building regulations, but it is becoming harder for local councillors to know if these properties are being developed properly.

If in doubt, then it is wise to always discuss any proposed work that you want to do with the local Planning Officers first.

Policy and Resources Committee

Cllr Julie Yelland - Chairman

I have heard P&R described as an internal facing Committee obsessed with policies! While part of our role is the annual review of policies, as a committee, we take our responsibilities very seriously. The Council is an employer and has all the legal duties that come with that. We also need to be sure that there are robust protections in place for members of the public using council facilities and all these policies need to be reviewed and potentially updated every year in line with legislation.

The Committee is privileged to be able to award grants to our local, grass roots not for profit organisations who do so much within the town. Our budget currently sits at £29,000 per year and, when added up, all the applications received each year usually exceed that amount. Councillors’ have very difficult decisions to make as each application is essential to the service the organisation provides. When we can only award part of the request, it isn’t because we don’t recognise the value the organisation brings to the town, it is simply because there is only so much money within the pot. Over the years, we have seen the size of the applications increase as costs of

delivering services rise. We have a grants policy which is reviewed annually to enable applicants to ensure they provide all the necessary information to get the best possible outcome for their projects.

During this financial year, we were fortunate to be able to tap into a time limited pot of money, which was made up of money that came from central government via West Devon Borough Council and a small amount of money that the Council set aside for business town center grants. This particular fund needed to be used up by 31st March 2025 and its purpose was to support the regeneration of the town center after Covid. It was agreed to offer grants to businesses to enable them to refresh their road frontages as this would have the longest lasting positive impact on the town center. Each business needed to be prepared to cover a minimum of 25% of the cost with the Committee being able to award up to £500 with the additional element from West Devon Borough Council being up to a maximum of £1,000. We add a condition to the grant that tradespeople/materials should be sourced locally as far as possible.

I am very grateful to the Committee who have shown commitment and dedication in considering all these applications and being prepared to make difficult decisions.

Parks Committee

Cllr Bob Tolley - Chairman

Simmons Park continues to be one of the towns biggest assets, and I am delighted that the Park Keeper James McGahey, his staff and volunteers have been rewarded for their management and hard work in being accredited with the internationally recognised Green Flag award.

What I am particularly please with is that the Green Flag (Community) award means it's not only celebrated as a well maintained, natural, ecologically sympathetic and in places manicured park, but for the part it plays in Okehampton's community life.

Its play areas, walks, bandstand and games areas, promotes health and well-being. While the open space in natures' amphitheatre,

hosting fairs, fetes and national celebrations, promotes community spirit and cohesion.

Helping to achieve this Green Flag award were our Park volunteers who have been with us a full 2 years now. They volunteer to give their time to helping our park staff maintain all aspects of the park. I would like to think in helping in the park they are learning from Jacob much about horticulture, natural environment and generally, in the words of Blur "Parklife".

I must also say I understand James' Park Tours are going well, and are fun, educational and in great demand.

On the subject of volunteers, although not quite Parks related, I would like to say I had the pleasure to meet and thank a volunteer who this year spent 22hrs, over three days, cleaning up and rejuvenating our great benefactor, Sidney Simmons family plot in All Saints church yard.

In the same area of the Church I can also report the cemetery now has a separate area/garden for the scattering of ashes and has already been used.

In other news monies are exclusively available to improve and refurbish the BMX track in North Road, and the tenders for that work have now been sent out.

A Council Working Group has also been set up to take forward the redesign and improvement to Simmons Park Putting Club which was set up in 1927, on the putting green outside Parklands, following further input from park users, child designers and businesses. Hopefully this will bring another updated attraction into the park, and in turn more visitors for the local business, making best use of rate-payers moneys, and maybe even reforming of the Simmons Park Putting Club.

There was a downside to the year, in that the heavy snow in November caused many healthy trees to topple or loose boughs, through the sheer weight of the snow. This was followed closely by Storm Darragh, in December which, due to the volume of wind and rain, for days, sent water flowing through and causing considerable

damage to the Parks river banks.

Aside from causing the park staff, to deal with these immediate threats, and in doing so, having to defer with their regular structured horticultural plan for the winter, both damaged river banks and trees have been inspected. Remedial work is needed, the additional unbudgeted Park funding that that may incur.

Generally speaking however James and his team have coped brilliantly to keep the Park and open spaces as well-groomed and maintained as they always have, whilst this year fighting against the more frequent and stronger attempts by nature to keep bugging it up!

Benefactors

Okehampton Town Council is incredibly grateful for the generosity of individuals who have donated their time, money, and skills to benefit our community, often choosing to remain anonymous. These thoughtful contributions have included trees for Simmons Park, a new battery-powered chainsaw for the Parks team, and beautifully handcrafted curtains for the Charter Hall. The Town Council extends its heartfelt thanks to all those who have supported us in this way. Your generosity helps enhance the town for the benefit of all



Okehampton Youth Council



With the help of Guy Cracknell, we now have a Youth Council logo, and thanks to grants from Cllr Lois Samuel, DCC, and Cllr George Dexter, WDBC, we have badges and hoodies.

In our first year we have participated in Okehampton Show raising awareness of the Youth Council, and a walk in Simmons Park with Park-Keeper, James, to think about safety to help with the Green Flag assessment.

We hosted a first aid training course for young people in February half term to help them learn what to do in an emergency situation.

We plan to:

- Make a presentation about the Youth Council at the Annual Town Assembly in April
- Consult with the Town Council about improvements to the BMX track
- Interview the new CEO of the Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust, Rachel Shaw, to ask her what she will be doing to improve our school and ensure that all children get the right education that they need.

For more information about the Youth Council go to the page on the [Council's Website](#) or follow us on Facebook and Instagram.

April 2024

- Okehampton Town Council submitted a petition to West Devon Borough Council for amendment to the boundary between itself and the neighbouring parish of Okehampton Hamlets. This was approved and the changes will take place 2027, at the next local council election. It is hoped that Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council will work with the Town Council over the next couple of years to ensure a smooth transition.



May 2024

- A Youth Council is now up and running – applications to join are welcome.



- Hedgehogs were released in Simmons Park from Greatfield Hedgehog Rescue



June 2024

- DCC's pay and display consultation for the implementation of on-street parking charging in Okehampton and other Devon communities was thwarted following strong objections by many of those who would have been affected.
- A joint celebration between Okehampton Town Council and Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council for D Day took place at the Show field with a fly past.



July 2024

- With thanks for a large donation from Okehampton United Charity, a new play tractor was purchased and installed in Simmons Park.



Okehampton
**United
Charities**

Funding for the Community

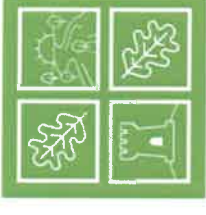
August 2024

- The Charter Hall roofing work was completed in August and the hall is once again watertight. Decoration of the inside of the hall was undertaken and new curtains made.



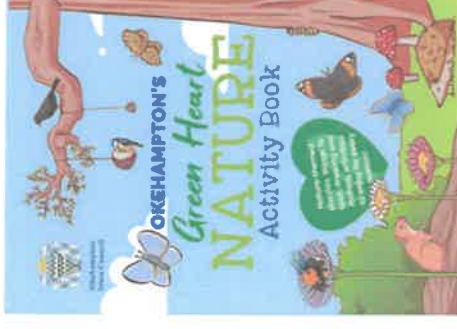
September 2024

- The referendum for the creation of a Business Improvement District (BID) to support traders and assist the economy of the town went ahead and was successful.



**OKEHAMPTON
BUSINESS
IMPROVEMENT
DISTRICT**

- A Park trail booklet has been created, copies are available from the Town Hall



October 2024

- The first Park Nature Trail took place in October Half Term



November 2024

- The annual Remembrance Day Parade took place. Participation in the Parade and Service at All Saints Church was bigger than ever this year, partially thanks to the weather which was kind. For the first time since before the Covid Pandemic a service was held inside the Church.



December 2024

- A scattering lawn has been created within the Council Cemetery adjacent to All Saints Church, booking to use the facility is essential.



January 2025

- The Neighbourhood Plan that had not passed inspection was paused because of the Government's plans to make changes to the National Planning Policy Framework.
- Continuation of essential fire protection work within council buildings
- Lobbying for the return of beds in Okehampton Hospital and improvement of NHS care services within Okehampton as well as throughout the country will continue.
- Tracey Bryant joined the Town Council as the new Finance Officer.
- Wildlife Information Boards were provided in Simmons Park



February 2025

- Tender for improvements to the BMX track are planned to take place in 2025, following which work to progress repairs and maintenance to the Skatepark will take place.
- The Youth Council hosted a First Aid Course in the Charter Hall funded by a grant from Cllr Lois Samuels' DCC Localities budget



March 2025

- New bike racks were fitted in Simmons Park and at the Skate Park



Noticeboard in the Victorian Arcade

Livestream of all council meetings

Town Hall Office
Open Monday to Thursday
9.30am to 4pm

Communication

Coming soon- Noticeboard on Fore Street

Facebook
<https://www.facebook.com/okehamptoncouncil>

The Town Council website
www.okehampton.gov.uk

All Council meetings open to the public

Instagram
<https://www.instagram.com/okehamptonc/>

How we deliver key messages to our residents



Newsletters- electronic and paper



OKEHAMPTON TOWN COUNCILLORS



Allenton Fisher
Mayor



Richard Colman
Deputy Mayor
Chair of Property



Bob Tolley
Chair of Parks



Tony Leech
Chair of Planning



Julie Yelland
Chair of P&R



Laura Bird



Terry Cummings



Michael Ireland



Frankee Hart



Carole Holt



Christine Marsh



David McNeill



Mark Richards



Simon Weekes

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

Councillor Meeting Attendance Figures (May 2024 to 31st March 2025)

	Property Committee		Policy & Resources Committee		Planning Committee		Parks Committee		Full Council		Overall attendance percentage
	Number of Meetings	Number attended	Number of Meetings	Number attended	Number of Meetings	Number attended	Number of Meetings	Number attended	Number of Meetings	Number attended	
Fisher	6	3	11	7	10	7	6	4	13	12	71.74
Colman	6	6	11	9	10	9	6	6	13	10	86.96
Tolley	6	5	11	10	10	9	6	6	13	13	93.48
Leech	6	6	11	11	10	9	6	5	13	13	95.65
Yelland	6	6	11	11	10	9	6	6	13	11	93.48
Bird	6	5	11	10	-	-	-	-	13	10	89.29
Cummings	6	4	-	-	10	10	-	-	13	12	86.67
Hart	-	-	11	4	-	-	5	4	11	6	51.85
Holt	6	4	-	-	-	-	6	5	13	11	80.00
Ireland	-	-	-	-	10	9	6	6	13	12	93.10
Marsh	-	-	11	9	-	-	6	6	13	10	83.33
Richards	6	6	-	-	10	10	-	-	13	12	96.55
Rogers *	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	4	4	100.00
Weekes	-	-	11	8	-	-	6	4	13	9	70.00
McNeill *	1	1	-	-	1	1	-	-	3	2	80.00

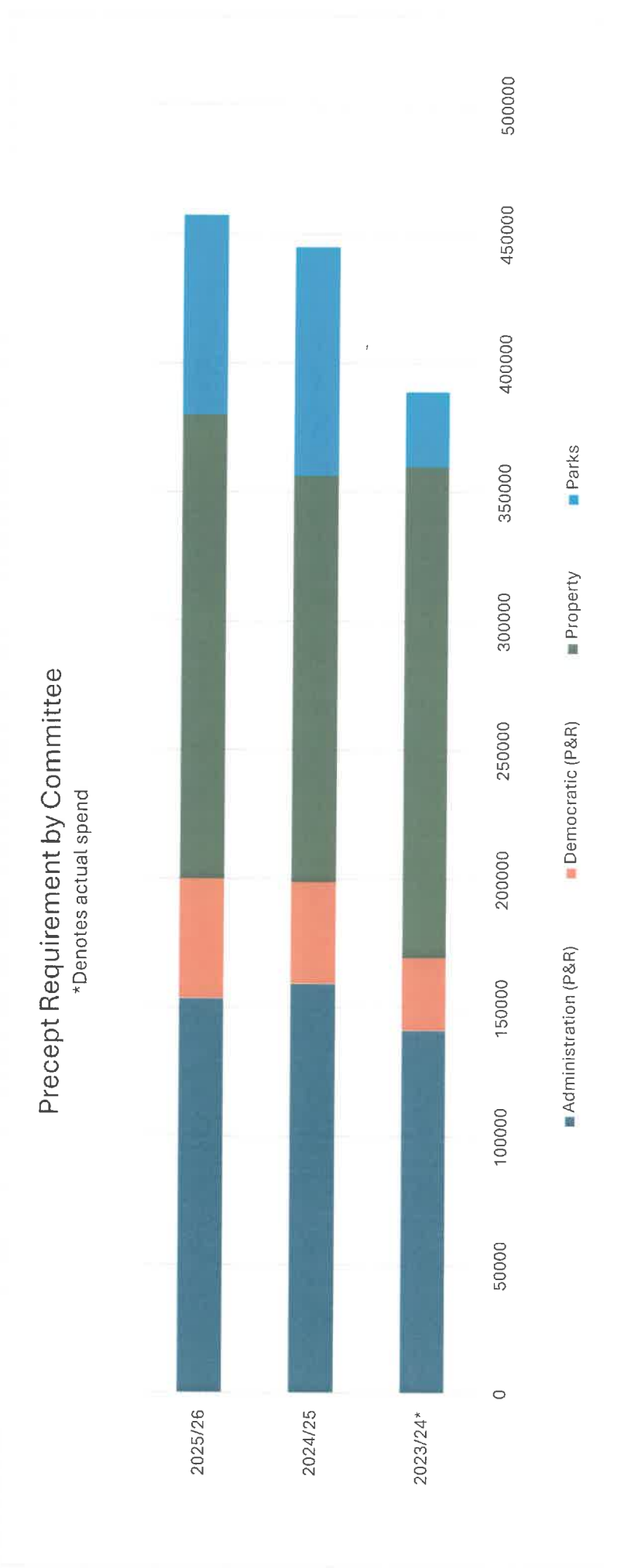
2025/26 Budget and Precept

The precept is the amount that town and parish councils can raise through their resident's council tax. In this area it is collected by West Devon Borough Council (WDBC) on behalf of the town and parish councils.

Following a process of scrutiny which commenced with budget workshops in August, the budget and precept of £457,313 was set by the Council on 20th January 2025 for the 2025/26 Financial Year. This amount equates to an increase of 2% or £0.07 p/week on the precept for a Band D property to meet the projected expenditure for the year. The budget can be found on the council website or obtained from the Council Office.

WDBC is now able to collect an additional premium from second homes, some of which will be passed to the town and parish councils through the precept. There aren't that many second homes within the town boundary, but this additional income means that the precept increase has been able to be kept to a minimum for the coming year.

The chart shows the actual budget spend for 2023/24, the precept for the current financial year 2024/25 and the recently approved precept for next year, 2025/26 which includes essential work to the riverbanks through Simmons Park



Finance and Governance

The Town Council's website contains details of all Town Council finances <https://www.okehampton.gov.uk/finance.php>. You can view the budget for the year, monthly management accounts, weekly payments lists as well as the Council's annual returns and a host of other information on the website.

Payments over £100 2024-2025				
Date	Name	Amount	Purpose	Category
01/04/2024	Thermometer Direct	£125.00	Le Jonnaires Thermometer Kit	Property
01/04/2024	WD8C	£122.26	Rates (Cemetery)	Parks
01/04/2024	WD8C	£7,731.11	Rates (Town Hall)	Property
01/04/2024	WD8C	£5,244.74	Rates (Simmons Car Park)	Parks
01/04/2024	WD8C	£3,043.90	Rates (Charter Hall)	Property
01/04/2024	WD8C	£1,844.30	Rates (Registrars Office)	Property
02/04/2024	Thompson & Morijan	£149.36	Seeds & Plants	Parks
02/04/2024	Eon	£232.12	Electric - Market Hall	Property
02/04/2024	Eon	£136.78	Electric - Charter Hall	Property
03/04/2024	YU Energy	£534.17	Gas	Property
08/04/2024	Brightpay	£139.00	Payroll software	Admin
10/04/2024	BT	£125.55	Telephone	Admin

Grants Received - 2024-25

Details of Grant and Awarding Organisation Amount Awarded Comments

WDBC Localities	Clir Dexter	£	200.00	park wildlife signs and books
Wild About Devon Community Fund		£	483.00	park wildlife signs and books and moth trap
Arnold Clarke		£	400.00	park wildlife signs and books
Okehamton United Charities		£	19,650.00	Play Tractor



Emma James
Town Clerk
Okehampton Town Council
Town Hall
Fore Street
Okehampton
Devon
EX20 1AA

19th October 2024

Dear Emma

Internal Audit

An audit was carried out by IACV, based on Tuesday 8 October 2024. This was the interim control audit, part of the annual internal audit coverage of the Council. Prior to this audit, a 30% audit was carried out remotely, which tested items which are required to be published on the Council's website.

	Actual Current Mth	Actual Year To Date	Current Annual Bud	Variance Annual Total	Committed Expenditure	Funds Available	% Spent	Tolerance below EAR
POLICY AND RESOURCES								
101 ADMIN								
1021 GRANTS RECEIVED	1,960	7,752	0	(7,752)			0.0%	
1080 MISC INCOME	368	1,953	0	(1,953)			0.0%	
1176 PRECEPT	0	444,996	444,996	0			100.0%	
1180 INTEREST	2,859	22,683	7,500	(15,183)			302.4%	
1191 INVESTMENT INCOME	0	250	250	0			100.0%	
ADMIN - Income	5,007	477,634	482,746	(24,888)			185.5%	0
4001 SALARIES	8,188	65,772	103,378	37,606		37,606	83.6%	
4009 STAFF TRAINING	0	4,024	3,000	(1,024)		(1,024)	134.1%	

If you can't find what you are looking for or need it in a different format - come into the Town Hall and ask. We are open Monday to Thursday 9:30am until 4pm



Grants under £500

All Saints Church Hall

£500 towards the purchase of a commercial dishwasher.

Okehampton Fairtrade Group

£125 to support the fairtrade community enabling the town to maintain its fairtrade status.

Okehampton Friendly Circle

£500 towards the cost of a coach for the group annual trip.

Meldon Viaduct Trust Charity

£250 towards the running of the service

OCRA

£500 towards the funding of a fields in trust celebration and Sporting Sunday event in July.

Okehampton United Ecclesiastical Charity

£500 towards the upkeep of St James' Chapel and the Town Clock.

Grants under £500

The Carnival Committee

£400 towards the running costs of the annual carnival

Okehampton Ladies Friendship Group

£342 towards the cost of room hire, refreshments for monthly meetings and for anniversary and Christmas celebrations

Okehampton Voices

£340 towards the purchase of a PA system and microphones for performances at events

ORIG

£500 towards maintenance of riverbanks, coppicing of vegetation and insurance costs.

RAF Cadets

£500 to support an adventure training activity for cadets.

Okehampton & District Twinning Association

£350 towards the provision of activities and events during a visit to Okehampton in 2024.



Grants over £500

Everything Okehampton	The Museum of Dartmoor Life	The Ockment Centre	Community Transport Group	TOR Support	Citizens Advice TNMWD
£2,000 towards Christmas Lights.	£3,500 towards the running costs of the Museum and £1,500 towards the Tourist Information Point.	£5,000 towards reception staffing costs.	£750 towards the running of the service	£3,000 to fund 56 counselling sessions	£4,000 towards the running of the service

Town Centre Business Initiative Grants

Dogberry and Finch	Edgemoor Properties	The Arcade Trust
£386.85	£1,500	£1,500

How do councils work in West Devon?

Devon County Council

Devon County Council provide services that cover the whole county such as roads, education, libraries, waste disposal and adult social care. This excludes Plymouth and Torbay who operate as unitary authorities and run all these services themselves.

www.devon.gov.uk

Town and Parish Councils

The most localised tier of local government is a parish or town council. They are often responsible for maintenance of their immediate amenities such as recreational areas, footpaths, and cemeteries. The parish council is also consulted on highway and planning applications.

www.westdevon.gov.uk/contactyourparishcouncil

West Devon Borough Council

The Borough Council provides local services such as housing, recycling and waste collection, environmental health, planning, and leisure facilities.

www.westdevon.gov.uk

Councillors

A councillor may serve on more than one tier of local government – so a county councillor may also be a borough councillor and a parish or town councillor.

Council Tax

West Devon Borough Council collects council tax on behalf of a number of statutory agencies:

- Devon County Council
- West Devon Borough Council
- Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon and Cornwall
- Devon and Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority
- Town and Parish Councils

Council tax is an essential source of local government revenue. We use our share to deliver quality public services, from caring for the most vulnerable in our communities to keeping our streets clean, and providing better services for our residents.

Okehampton Town Council	West Devon Borough Council	Devon County Council
Simmons Park	Street name and numbering	Traffic Signs
All Saints newest Cemetery	Memorial trees and benches	Streetlamps
Clapps Wood	Council Tax and Business Rates	Flood protection
Skate Park	Business Support	Trip Hazards
Charter Hall	Fly tipping, enforcement and clearance on council land	Underground heritage preservation
Town Hall	Food hygiene inspections & complaints	Traffic lights
Fairplace Garden	Stray dogs, dog fouling and dog bins	On street parking
Fairplace toilets	Street litter bins	School services
Market Street toilets	Abandoned vehicles on public roads and council owned land	Roads and transport including potholes and bollards
	Garden waste (subscription service)	Blocked drains
	Licensing authority for businesses such as pubs restaurants and zoos	Initial assessment by DCC care direct
	Recycling, refuse collection & bottle banks	Cleaning leaves and odour
	Play parks on council land	
	Community safety	
	Events licences	
		Air quality monitoring and reporting

Staff Structure (2024/25)

