

**Minutes of a meeting of Okehampton Town Council held on
Monday 20th January 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 J Yelland (Chairman, Policy & Resources Committee)
Councillor L Bird
Councillor T Cummings
Councillor M Ireland
Councillor C Marsh
Councillor M Richards
Councillor S Weekes

In Attendance: Mrs E James (Clerk)
Cllr G Dexter (WDBC)
Cllr L Samuel (DCC)
1 Member of the Public

Action

Cllr Fisher welcomed those present and reminded Councillors that they were prohibited from voting on the budget or precept by Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 if their council tax was unpaid for more than two months.

534 Apologies for Absence – On the proposition of Cllr Ireland, seconded Cllr Bird, it was **RESOLVED** to approve apologies tendered by Cllr Hart (health), Cllr Holt (health) and Cllr Colman (health).

535 Declarations of Interest – Cllr Weekes declared an interest in relation to Minute Reference 545.

536 Public Participation – A member of the public who had applied for co-option addressed the Council.

537 Members Questions – None

538 West Devon Borough Council – Reports from Cllrs Leech and Dexter had previously been circulated.

Cllr Dexter expanded on his report advising that WDBC was proposing a balanced budget for 2025/26 but were forecasting a £1.6M deficit for 2026/27 because government funding was being redirected away from rural areas. DCC had applied to the government to delay elections for a Unitary Council. He believed that town and parish councils would have a bigger role in the future.

539 Devon County Council – A report from Cllr Samuel had been circulated earlier in the day and she expanded upon the Unitary proposal. DCC had written to the government asking for elections to be postponed.

540 Questions Arising from Members Reports – Cllr Samuel responded to a question from Cllr Richards advising that the Government had given councils a short timescale to respond to the Devolution White Paper which had resulted in them responding separately. A County Combined Authority in Devon and Torbay had already been approved. The Government was pushing devolution and within those CCAs would become be unitary authorities.

541 Adoption of Minutes of Committees and to Receive Questions from Members Thereon

541.1	On the proposition of Cllr Marsh, seconded Cllr Fisher, it was RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the Policy & Resources Committee meetings held on 4 th and 25 th November, 2 nd and 9 th December 2024.	
542	Full Council Meeting Minutes – The minutes of the Town Council meetings held on 16 th December 2024 and 6 th January 2025 were approved on the proposition of Cllr Fisher, seconded by Cllr Ireland, and signed by the Mayor.	
543	Co-option – Cllr Fisher declared a personal interest and left the room for this item of business in accordance with the Co-option Policy. Cllr Tolley, took the Chair. The candidate was invited to speak and briefly addressed the council before leaving for the voting process. An application that had been received was voted upon in accordance with the Co-option Policy. Following a vote David McNeill was co-opted to the North Ward of the Council and it was agreed he would site on the Planning and Property Committees. (Cllr Fisher and the candidate returned to the meeting)	Clerk
544	Finance and Governance - On the proposition of Cllr Marsh, seconded Cllr Leech, it was RESOLVED to approve the schedule of payments.	
545	2025/26 Budget and Precept –	
545.1	Budget - On the proposition of Cllr Marsh, seconded Cllr Tolley, it was RESOLVED to approve V7 of the budget with the addition of £5,000 in an Earmarked Fund towards the cost of repairs to the Simmons Park riverbank.	
545.2	Precept - On the proposition of Cllr Marsh, seconded Cllr Tolley (1 abstention), it was RESOLVED to approve the precept requirement of £457,313, for the 2025/26 financial year which included the addition of £5,000 towards riverbank repairs. The precept requirement amounted to an increase of 2.01% on a Band D property.	
546	Meetings, Projects and Consultations	
546.1	Community Governance Boundary Review – The Clerk reported that WDBC were arranging a meeting with Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council. On the proposition of Cllr Marsh, seconded Cllr Bird (1 abstention) it was RESOLVED to defer any further decisions until the meeting had taken place.	Clerk
546.2	Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework – On the proposition of Cllr Fisher, seconded Cllr Marsh, it was RESOLVED that Councillors Fisher and Yelland review the consultation with the Clerk. Councillors were reminded that they could respond as individual councillors.	Clerk
546.3	Local Audit Reform – It was agreed not to respond to the consultation.	
547	Policies and Documents – On the proposition of Cllr Fisher, seconded Cllr Weekes, it was RESOLVED to approve the following documents en bloc as recommended by the Policy & Resources Committee: a) Grant Policy b) Asbestos Management Plan c) Bullying and Harassment Policy & Procedure (including sexual harassment) d) Reserves Policy – including the General Reserve amount of four months be held by the Council for the 2025/26 financial year e) Information and Data Protection Policy f) Privacy Notices g) Subject Access Request Policy	Clerk

548	<u>Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Devolution White Paper</u> – The previously circulated paper published on 16 th December 2024 was noted. It was not clear what the expectation of town and parish councils would be, and concern was raised about the provision of funding and resources for town and parish councils if they took on assets and services.	
549	<u>Simmons Homes Charity</u> – The request had been withdrawn.	
550	<u>Neighbourhood Plan</u>	
550.1	Cllr Leech provided an update in relation to the situation surrounding Neighbourhood Plans including the impact changes to NPPF, government housing development policy and a new local plan may have on them. New plans would have to comply with the NPPF, other local plans and supplementary planning documents that had not yet been updated. The Joint Local Plan was out of date due legislative changes that had increased housing development land supply, meaning that 2.5 years was now held instead of the required 5 years.	
550.2	The Clerk was requested to invite the WDBC Senior Strategic Planning Officer to meet informally with the council to provide an update on Neighbourhood Planning and the impact of recent and upcoming changes in policy	Clerk
550.3	The need for a report and proposal from Cllr Richards to be considered within Part 2 was queried. Cllr Richards explained it was predominantly because of the costings provided on the associated document. On the proposition of Cllr Marsh, seconded Cllr Tolley (1 against), it was RESOLVED to defer the item to Part 2.	
551	<u>Accessibility Grading System</u> – Correspondence from a member of the public in relation to accessibility of businesses to people with disabilities was considered. Potential risks including legal implications, time and costs as set out in the previously circulated report were noted. On the proposition of Cllr Yelland, seconded Cllr Bird, it was RESOLVED to formally advise the Business Improvement District that concerns had been expressed and to see if they wished to take the proposal forward.	
552	<u>Traffic Infrastructure</u> – It was agreed that a request from a member of the public that a discussion was opened with DCC in relation to traffic and infrastructure in Okehampton be considered within Part 2 because of the quotation that had been received.	
553	<u>Council Chamber Sound System</u> – It was noted that the sound system was irreparable. Replacement with a system that would be suitable for use for hybrid meetings and taking in account the increase in Councillors in May 2027 would be reviewed and considered at a later date.	
554	<u>Mayors Civic Diary Report</u> – Cllr Fisher had attended Plait, Courtney Players and Alzheimer's Coffee Mornings, DCC Drug Seminar, Inspiration Okehampton 25 th anniversary, an event for Rev Cook, Wellness Singers and would be presenting a grant cheque to Citizens Advice in the next few days.	
555	<u>Reports of Council working/Task & Finish Groups:</u>	
555.1	Climate Change – No meeting had been held.	
556	<u>Reports on Current Activities by Community Groups with Town Council Representation</u>	
556.1	Neighbourhood Plan Group – No further report.	
557	<u>Council Representatives</u>	

557.1	Devon Communities Together – On the proposition of Cllr Yelland, seconded Cllr Tolley, it was RESOLVED to appoint Cllr Leech as the Council's representative to the organisation.	
557.2	Okehampton Hospital – The resignation of Cllr Richards from the North Dartmoor Health Initiative was noted. On the proposition of Cllr Fisher, seconded Cllr Leech, it was RESOLVED to appoint Cllr Colman.	
558	<u>Members' Reports and Items for Agendas</u>	
558.1	Business Improvement District – Cllr Tolley advised the next meeting was on 30 th January.	
558.2	DCC Regeneration Board – Cllr Tolley advised the next meeting was on 4 th March.	
558.3	Okehampton Community Hospital – No update.	
558.4	Rural Market Town Group – No update.	
558.5	Transition Town Okehampton – Cllr Cummings advised a meeting was being held in the next few days.	
559	<u>PART TWO – CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS</u> On the proposition of Cllr Ireland, seconded Cllr Bird 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.	
560	<u>Outstanding Balances</u> – On the proposition of Cllr Marsh, seconded Cllr Weekes, it was RESOLVED to approve a recommendation by the Policy & Resources Committee that a debt of £520.40 be written off.	Finance Officer
561	<u>Public Toilet Cleaning</u> - On the proposition of Cllr Ireland, seconded Cllr Tolley, it was RESOLVED to approve the cleaning of the facilities in Market Street and Fairplace by WDBC the cost of which was included within the budget for 2025/26.	
562	<u>Simmons Park Riverbank Maintenance</u> – The draft tender documentation and timescales were considered. On the proposition of Cllr Weekes, seconded Cllr Cummings, it was RESOLVED to approve the draft documentation including amendment of dates and that due to the specialised nature of the work identified companies be invited to tender for the project.	Clerk
563	<u>Cemetery Land Purchase</u> – Correspondence received from the land agent advising that the Diocese had agreed in principle to sell the Council land for use as a cemetery was considered. It was noted that work to confirm suitability of the land for this use including surveys, risk assessments and a planning application would be at the council's risk whilst the formal procedures for the sale and negotiations progressed. On the proposition of Cllr Leech, seconded Cllr Weekes, it was RESOLVED to progress with surveys, risk assessment and other necessary procedures as required.	Clerk
564	<u>Traffic Infrastructure</u> – On the proposition of Cllr Marsh, seconded Cllr Yelland (1 abstention), it was RESOLVED that the council would support in principle a review of traffic infrastructure in the town centre as requested by a member of the public but would not contribute financially.	Clerk

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

- 565** **Neighbourhood Plan** – Consideration was given to a paper by Cllr Richards. It was commented that Neighbourhood Plans were in limbo with changes in legislation yet to be fully understood and the risk that supplementary planning guides could be amended. Neighbourhood Plan groups should be run by the community rather than a specifically named group or organisation. Local Councils were required to oversee Neighbourhood Plans. Concerns were raised about potential conflicts of interest within the proposals.

On the proposition of Cllr Leech, seconded Cllr Marsh (1 abstention), it was **RESOLVED** that an informal meeting with a WDBC Planning Officer be held, following which the item would be added to an appropriate agenda for further consideration.

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 9pm.

Councillor Fisher, Mayor