

Okehampton Town Council
Full Council 19th January 2026
Meeting Report

Date:	8 th January 2026
Name:	Emma James

13. 2026/27 Budget and Precept

The Tax Base for 2026/27 has increased by 45.86 properties - from 2,277.41 in 2025/26 to 2,323.27. This means that there are more properties for the precept to be shared between. A breakdown of these changes is as follows:

Changes relating to second homes	+21.07
Changes NOT relating to second homes	+24.79

V3 Draft Budget

The draft budget for 2026/27 amounts to a precept demand of £465,273. This is an increase of £7,960 over the 2025/26 demand.

In comparison to 2025/26 this increase in precept requirement amounts to a **decrease** of £0.53p p/annum, 0.27% for a Band D property (£0.05p p/month).

2025/26	£200.80 p/annum
2026/27	£200.27 p/annum.

Since the Policy & Resources Committee reviewed and recommended the budget and precept to Full Council at a meeting on 8th December a number of factors have changed and/or occurred.

- a) Storms have caused significant additional damage to the Simmons Park riverbanks
- b) Falling of a large tree in Simmons Park causing substantial damage to banks and pathways
- c) Failure of the cemetery fence
- d) Cemetery land purchase survey, inspection and planning fees
- e) Potential acquisition of assets from WDBC in connection with the Local Government Review, including legal fees.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the above factors are taken into account during the final setting of the budget and precept at the meeting of the council on 19th January 2025. Additional funds could be added to the budget and precept requirement to assist with the increased likely costs:

Additional Amount	Budget/Precept Requirement	Increased Annual cost Per/Band D	Increased Monthly Cost Per/Band D	% Increase p/annum
£5,000	£470,273	£1.62	£0.14	0.81
£10,000	£475,273	£3.77	£0.31	1.88
£15,000	£480,273	£5.92	£0.49	2.95
£20,000	£485,273	£8.07	£0.67	4.02

15. **Historic Plaque/Recognition Scheme** – To consider a request from a member of the public that a former local person, James Coombe, be recognised through the National Blue Plaque or other scheme

Information provided by a member of the public:

James Coombe (1824-1907): Overview of Key Life Events

James Coombe was described by the *Western Times* in its headline description of his funeral and obituary in 1907 as '*An Okehampton Worthy*' - that is someone of high reputation, who by their actions and achievements are held in such esteem in the community as to be deserving of great respect. And no wonder, as from the description his funeral procession through the town had all the pomp of a state funeral and appeared to be the culmination and outpouring of respect and admiration for this local man.

He was born in 1824 in humble circumstances as the son of a farm labourer in Sticklepath and became a wool comber at the factory there. He then learnt the hairdressing business in Okehampton at weekends before joining the Royal Navy. He left and returned to Okehampton in 1856 as a skilled musician and as a proclaimed 'hero of Bumarsand' for being in the Baltic during the Crimean War and receiving the campaign medal.

He set up shop at 3 East Street as a hairdresser where he both lived and worked and raised a family until his death over five decades later.

He moved almost uniquely from a being a 'Jack Tar' (in the Navy) to a 'Tommy Atkins' (in the Army), by joining the Devon Volunteer Rifles when that system of national defence was set up from 1860. He became a colour sergeant and a 'crack' shot throughout winning competitions and taking part at both local and the national Wimbledon and then, Bisley, ranges.

He was the bandmaster for the Volunteers and declared himself to be a 'professor of music' setting up local bands and training members of the different communities (teaching at one time as many as seven bands across the north Dartmoor area) and his bands played all across the area for many years, which may have helped to supplement his income to support his growing family.

James helped inaugurate the Masonic Lodge in Okehampton in 1878 and was part of the Corporation challenging it to carry out public works as part of the Grand Jury process that existed before Okehampton held its first elections in 1885. He was also described as having been a 'faithful and diligent representative of the Borough' as a town councillor and the alderman for many years and a member of the 'belfry' bell ringers for decades.

Lauded by his town peers in a private gathering late in life as an alternative to a more public testimonial, he was described as having a 'kind hearted disposition' from boyhood and a 'generous spirit'. He was quoted as saying it had '*always been his endeavour to promote the prosperity of Okehampton and the happiness and welfare of those who lived in the dear old place*'.

James remained on the volunteer army reserve and veteran list and was awarded the Volunteer Long Service medal before he passed away and was still standing in local elections as he approached his eighties.

James's funeral, as described in the newspapers at the time, had all the appearance of something grand and high status. The coffin was conveyed in a glass hearse and there was a long procession headed by a squad of 4th Devon Volunteers' (for whom James had

been the bandmaster) and followed by family, friends, Masonic dignitaries and the Town Mayor and members of the Town Council and officials. More than 100 people were reported as being present; such was the esteem and high reputation within which James and his achievements appeared to be held.

His funeral was conducted at the parish church of All Saints, Okehampton where he was buried in a plot with his first wife who predeceased him. A tall and distinctively decorated headstone marks the location. A knell was rung on the church bells in James's honour at the end of the ceremony and a 'muffled peal' was delivered in his memory the following weekend.

James's death certificate at 83 years of age declared him to be a 'master hairdresser' and a 'naval pensioner'.

Source Citations:

Census Returns;

Local Directories (held at Okehampton Library);

Published newspaper articles;

Online Family History Records ('Find My Past' and 'Ancestry').

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/national-blue-plaque-scheme/make-a-nomination/>

Applications to the scheme are by nomination and not guaranteed. The scheme is currently closed and reopens for nominations in May 2026.

Essential criteria for National Blue Plaque Scheme nominations:

- Figures proposed for commemoration must, without exception, have died at least 20 years ago. Animals and fictitious characters will not be considered.
- To be chosen for a plaque, a person must be understood by the National Blue Plaques Panel:
 - To have made an important contribution to human welfare or happiness, and/or
 - To have made an exceptional impact in their field, community or on society at large
- We encourage a wide range of applications from all communities and welcome the nomination of people that help us tell a broader story of a place or community of people: for example, but not limited to, women, those from minority ethnic groups, LGBTQ+ people, disabled people, or working-class people.
- Proposals may be considered for plaques commemorating more than 1 person (for example, a duo, group, society or organisation) providing:
 - There is an overarching theme or connection between the people being commemorated
 - Each figure named on the plaque is significant in their own right
 - Each person named on the plaque meets the criteria set above
- Proposals can also be considered for the commemoration of buildings that have a historical significance of public interest, other than a particular personal association, either because:
 - A historical event of particular importance occurred there, or
 - The building had an important historical significance that is not obvious from its present appearance, use or from any existing signage or commemoration.
- The National Blue Plaques Panel will pay due regard to disparities in representation and in the overall balance of cases being shortlisted. The panel will consider the current geographical distribution of plaques across England.

- There should be a strong and clear association between the property and the proposed person: for example, place of birth, death, childhood home, a substantial period of residence or a significant moment in life or career.
- The building must be in such condition that the person being commemorated would recognise it from the outside.
- A person's residence in a given place should include significant life events (for example, birth, death, education, work) and/or reflect a significant period in their life or work, in terms of length of time or importance.
- A national blue plaque would not normally be considered for someone who is already commemorated by a plaque in the town or city in which they have been nominated. This is because the purpose of the Historic England National Blue Plaque Scheme is to complement existing schemes. A national blue plaque would be considered if a person has been recognised only through other forms of commemoration, such as statues, place names, or perhaps if a plaque has been put up by private individuals.
- A plaque must be clearly visible from the public road or right of way. A plaque will normally be erected only on a building and not on a boundary wall or gate pier.
- Plaques shall not be erected to commemorate short-term associations of a person with educational or ecclesiastical buildings, military establishments, hospitals, hotels, or private clubs. Plaques shall not be erected on royal palaces or the Inns of Court, or on any building which has too many significant personal associations to merit any one being singled out.
- No more than 2 plaques are allowed on 1 building.

16. Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) – To consider correspondence from DCC Highways in relation to a scheme for the provision of infrastructure

Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI). Update and Next Steps.

We felt it was important to make contact again before the Christmas break with a progress update. Devon County Council are still finalising contracts with the preferred bidder, which has unfortunately taken much longer than anticipated. We hope to be able to confirm the successful bidder and officially award the tender early in the new year.

Looking ahead, once the tender has been awarded, we plan to arrange a Microsoft Teams call to share a full update with you. In the meantime, please could you:

1. Confirm you are still interested in participating in this process;
2. Review the attached to ensure that your respective site is listed and the details we hold for this site are correct; and
3. Provide your current contact details to ensure our records are up-to-date.

Simmons Park, was some time ago registered, for potential discussion once DCC had progressed their scheme.

The Council is requested to consider if it wishes to progress, in principle in order to ascertain further information.

17. Nomination of Trustee to Okehampton Foundation – To resolve to nominate a Trustee to Okehampton United Charity to fill the casual vacancy following a resignation.

Okehampton Town Council has been invited to nominate a Trustee to the Okehampton Foundation following a resignation. The details of two interested persons have been forwarded, with their consent, for consideration, other persons can however still be nominated.

The current demographic of the board - 2 women 9 men.

Trustees are looking for someone with a local connection and genuine interest in Okehampton and the Hamlets. Trustees typically would be expected to be able to commit at least half day a week to charity business.