

Okehampton Town Council
Full Council Meeting 23rd March 2026
Meeting Report

Date:	13 th March 2026
Name:	Emma James

11. Projects and Consultations
11.1 Local Government Reorganisation
a) To consider any updates and actions arising

The following has been received from DCC in response to the council's request for information about their proposal:

Thank you for your question about whether the Devon Coast and Countryside Unitary Council would have sufficient funding to deliver services effectively. I am sorry for the delay in sending you our response.

The financial modelling that we have undertaken demonstrates that this authority would be financially viable and sustainable. With a population of around 455,000 people, it would have total core spending power of £511.3 million, made up of £143.9 million in Settlement Funding Assessment from government and £367.4 million in council tax. Against estimated net costs of £503.5 million, this creates a projected surplus of £7.7 million.

This is essential because it provides resilience against demand pressures and financial shocks rather than leaving the council operating at the edge of its resources. All four proposed unitary councils show similar surplus positions in our modelling, which demonstrates that the modified proposal creates a balanced and sustainable structure across Devon.

The funding calculation uses the government's Fair Funding Review 2.0 formula, modelled by PIXEL, specialist consultants in local government finance. This formula recognises that rural authorities have different cost structures from urban ones, with factors like sparsity and dispersed service delivery built into the funding assessment.

This compares favourably with the current position. Under the existing two-tier structure, councils across Devon face a combined budget gap forecast to exceed £140 million by 2028/29. The four-unitary model addresses this structural deficit while creating authorities with the scale and capacity to invest in transformation.

The Devon Coast and Countryside authority would be comparable in overall resource terms to the middle quartiles of existing English unitary councils. The modelling has been developed collaboratively with finance colleagues across all Devon councils and has been subject to external review, giving confidence in the projections.

I hope this answers your question but please let us know if you need any further clarification.

Kind regards

b) To note WDBC's Asset Policy, consider the impact on the council's request for the acquisition of assets and any actions arising

Policy for the transfer of community assets

Introduction:

The Council has received a number of requests from town and parish councils to transfer land and property to them. The purpose of this policy is to ensure any such requests are dealt with on a fair and consistent basis. A consistent and fair approach is taken in responding to those requests.

Context:

The Council has a strong track-record of service delivery for its communities since its creation in 1974. Before that, services were delivered with equal pride by the councils that preceded it.

As such, specifically when considering land and property, the Council is only ever a long-term custodian. It is short sighted to think that divesting public land and property at this time, without a clear strategic aim, is of benefit to our communities in and of itself.

In this context our collective endeavour must be on ensuring that our residents continue to have access to those services and facilities that are important to our local communities, rather than focus on which Council owns them. This policy is designed with that key principle in mind.

Land and property types:

The Council holds land and property for broadly three reasons:

- Category 1: To deliver our services;
- Category 2: For commercial and strategic reasons; and
- Category 3: As custodians of land held for and on behalf of our

residents and communities Examples (this is not a conclusive list) from each category are as follows

- a) Our HQ buildings and waste depots
- b) Business units, car parks, investment property
- c) Parks, open spaces, sports pitches

The Council's Position on transfers:

The Council will only consider asset transfer requests for land or property in category 3 above.

It reserves the right to say no if it judges the transfer is neither in the interest of the community or the Council and of any potential successor authority. This will include consideration being given to the long-term stewardship, operational and governance requirements and the ability for the transferee to meet those requirements.

In all cases, the transfer will require the continued use of land for its current purpose, and the Council will place such legal restrictions as are required to ensure that the land is protected in perpetuity for that use. This is non-negotiable and may take the form of either restrictive covenants or leases of typically 99 or 999 years.

Given the nature of the land and property being considered for transfer (i.e. 'community assets' as defined by this policy) and the restrictions being imposed, it is judged that the council will have met its obligations regarding achieving best consideration.

It should also be noted that each case is assessed and approved (or rejected) on an individual basis, so there can be no assumption between individual cases. Additionally, there may be land and property that does not neatly fall into the above categories, in which instances the Council will make whatever decisions it considers appropriate to meet its legal duty in those cases.

The way in which request will be dealt with:

History shows that most asset transfers take 2 years to complete and that they cost the Council significant resource to manage. The question of resources and timeframes is a critical one. To mitigate this concern, the Council will adopt the following approach:

- A standard form of transfer and standard terms which are non-negotiable. All terms agreed in the heads of terms will be final and not subject to change.
- The opportunity to have transfers prioritised through outsourcing of legal work, if the transferee agrees to pay for it.
- The council has made additional resource available in the land and property team to manage requests (paid for by the Council).
- Each town and parish to be given one opportunity to make a request, which once confirmed will proceed without further change to the scope during the process, to ensure each community has a fair chance to make such a request.

- We will set a deadline (**17:00 May 8 2026**) for towns and parishes to submit their requests and these will then be dealt with based on the simplest and most straightforward requests (which comply with the policy) being dealt with first. While we will endeavour to do so there is no guarantee that all requests can/will be processed ahead of any restrictions that may be imposed preventing disposals of land and property taking effect.

Governance:

The decision on requests for transfers will be made in accordance with the Council's scheme of delegation in chapter 2 of the constitution.

There is no right of appeal.

Land & property open market sales:

This policy has no bearing on open market sales, which the Council can and will continue to consider if it aligns to its strategic aims. This policy only relates to asset transfers, which by implication have no financial consideration.

11.2 Community Governance Boundary Change – To consider an update from the Clerk and, if received, Solicitors advice regarding the precepting arrangements.

WDBC have acknowledged the request for the Order to be Made by 31st May 2026 with the relevant effective from dates thereon.

11.3 Neighbourhood Plan – To consider feedback received from WDBC and action taken

The following correspondence was received from WDBC on 6th March 2026 and Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council have been requested to provide the information required.

Apologies for the delay – the wheels of legal turn slowly at times.

I have now had feedback from both the legal team and the Head of Strategic Planning. They feel that – on the basis that specific evidence is supplied by the Hamlets PC then you could submit a further application for area designation and we would be minded to approve. We would, though, need direct contact from the Hamlets PC – which should include a copy of minutes from a PC meeting agreeing the decision to withdraw from the Okehampton and Hamlets Neighbourhood Plan process and having no wish to pursue a future plan themselves. We would also need a statement to that effect, supplied by the Hamlets PC on a letterhead, to back up this. We feel this would be adequate to terminate the stalled ‘in-progress’ plan and for you to designate a new area for the new Okehampton NP.

There is a briefing regarding the new NPPF next Thursday (12th) which the Parish Council will have been notified of. I would suggest representatives attending since the briefing will cover the requirements of the new NPPF in relation to neighbourhood plans (particularly Paragraph 14) which would be useful to have knowledge of in the future formation of a plan.

11.4 Lloyds Bank Closure – To note correspondence from Sir Mel Stride MP

The following correspondence was received through Sir Mel Stride MP on 2nd March 2026

I am delighted to inform you that the recommended assisted counter service is now live, as of Thursday 26th February, from the Post Office in Okehampton.

The enhanced banking office (EBO) is available at the Post Office now with increased provision and capacity to enable the running of a full-time counter service (Monday-Friday - 9am-5pm) The Post Office has also been improved with additional signage and information about the access to cash services available.

13. Finance

13.2 Effectiveness of Internal Controls – To consider a report from the Policy & Resources Committee following a review of the effectiveness of the Council’s internal controls.

Review of Effectiveness of Internal Controls – March 2026

Internal Control Measure	Explanatory Commentary	Current Practice and areas for development
Standing Orders and Financial Regulations in place and up to date.	The authority needs to have Standing Orders and Financial Regulations governing how it operates. Financial Regulations need to incorporate provision for securing competition and regulating the way tenders are invited. These need to	The Council adopted the new model Financial Regulations, as prepared by the National Association of Local Councils, in May 2025. These will be reviewed for adoption by the council in May 2026. Standing Orders were re-adopted in June 2025.

	be regularly reviewed, fit for purpose, and adhered to.	
Safe and Effective arrangements to Safeguard Public Money. (Including the segregation of duties)	<p>A council needs to have practical and resilient arrangements covering making payments, and handling receipts.</p> <p>Authorities need to have in place safe and efficient arrangements to safeguard public money.</p>	<p>Procedures for the safe and effective safeguarding of public money are set out in Financial Regulations.</p> <p>The Council's Financial Regulations are clear, transparent and easy to follow. For example, the document clearly sets out the delegated authority of the Clerk, other members of Staff, Committees and ultimately the Council. The system is robust and transparent for staff, members and residents. Financial Regulations were reviewed and adoption by the Council in May 2025.</p> <p>The payment of invoices is made in line with Financial Regulations. Dual authority is required for all payments and all payments are reported to council for approval. The Finance Officer or Clerk sets up the payment and a councillor authorises; a small risk of error or fraud still exists.</p> <p>A nominated Councillor completes monthly audits of the accounts to further assist further reducing risks.</p>
Effectiveness arrangements to manage the Council's finances.	<p>Every authority needs to arrange for the proper administration of its financial affairs and ensure that one of its officers (the RFO) has formal responsibility for those affairs</p>	<p>At Okehampton Town Council, the Clerk has been appointed as the RFO. The Clerk is CiLCA qualified and working towards the Community Governance degree at Level 6 having successfully completed Levels 4 and 5.</p> <p>The Finance Officer has completed FiLCA.</p>
Regular Financial Reporting	<p>Regular financial reporting is needed to allow members to scrutinise expenditure and ensure that money is being spent in line with council budgets and policy.</p> <p>The bank reconciliation is the key document in managing the council's funds. It is a requirement of the current model financial regulations that bank reconciliations be prepared regularly, approved by members and signed as part of the regular minute record.</p>	<p>The Policy and Resources Committee meet approximately bi-monthly. Monthly comprehensive financial management reports are provided to every meeting. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget Report • Bank Reconciliation • Reserves <p>A schedule of payments, as necessary, is considered by all committees and full council in accordance with Committee Terms of Reference. This includes BACS and cheque payments, direct debits,</p>

	Regular budget reports detailing expected and actual expenditure against budget are also required.	standing orders and any payments made by debit card held by the Clerk.
Risk Management	As a minimum, an authority must identify and assess risks and address those identified risks by mitigating or managing them. The Council undertake assessments of risk throughout the year including but not limited to projects, reserves it holds and risks to income.	<p>The Council reviews its Financial Risk Assessment at least annually in May and other risks throughout the year.</p> <p>The Council's precept for 2025/26 is £457,313 and £475,273 for 2026/27. As such the Council is not covered by the Financial Services Compensation Scheme. The council have recognised this and mitigate the risks by and spreading funds across banks in accordance with its policies including the Treasury and Investment Policy & Strategy.</p>
Internal Control Regular Review	<p>In addition to completing an annual review of Internal Controls it is helpful for councils to have a system of regular review and scrutiny in place. This ensures existing financial controls are being adhered to and helps identify areas for development at an early stage.</p> <p>Simple checks conducted by members, can provide reassurance to a council and other stakeholders that Internal Control measures are adhered to.</p>	<p>The Council nominates a Member annually to undertake monthly audits of its bank reconciliations and other financial transactions, including petty cash. These checks are reported to meetings of the Policy & Resources Committee.</p> <p>Payments are approved at meetings of the council or its committees. Any payments made outside of this in accordance with delegated powers are reported to the next meeting.</p>
Audit and Independent Review	The Internal Audit is in place to check that processes are being followed, and the External Audit ensures transparency and that financial statements are produced correctly.	<p>IAC Audit and Consultancy have been appointed by the Council to undertake internal audits twice yearly. In June 2025 IAC Audit and Consultancy were appointed as the Council's Internal Auditor for a further three-year agreement – 2025/26, 2026/27 and 2027/28.</p> <p>All reports from both the internal and external auditors are reviewed by the council and action taken as necessary to address issues or recommendations raised. The reports are published on the council's website.</p>
Training and Awareness	Staff and members should understand their role and	Training courses are available for staff and councillors. Budget

	responsibilities in relation to financial control	workshops are held annually in the summer months to assist councillors in the understanding of the council finances, as a review of the current budget and to start planning for the next financial year.
Transparency and Communication to the Public	Councils should regularly communicate financial information to the public. This could be by publishing information in a newsletter or the website.	Information on the Town Council website is comprehensive and up to date.

13.3 Asset Register – To review and resolve to approve the asset register as of 31st March 2026 including additions and disposals

Asset Register Additions & Disposals 2025/26

Description of Asset	Location	Acquisition Date	Additions £	Disposals £
Play Equipment				
Play equipment - Rotator Spicas	Simmons Park	13/11/2025		£ 750.00
Pump Track	Skatepark	01/07/2025	£ 49,991.36	
Charter Hall				
Dishwasher	Kitchen	16/02/2026	£ 1,725.00	
Civic Regalia				
Mayor's Chain on velvet collar	Town Hall	14/04/2025	£ 5,264.65	
IT Equipment				
3 x Lenovo laptops	Town Hall	01/02/2026	£ 1,593.75	
Meeting Owl	Town Hall	09/01/2026	£ 1,853.00	
TOTALS			£ 60,427.76	£ 750.00

Okehampton Town Council
Asset Register
31st March 2025

Serial	Description of Asset	Location	Acquisition Date	Annual Return 2024/25	Additions £	Disposals £	Annual Return 2025/26
Freehold Land and Buildings							
1a	Town Hall/Charter Hall	Fore St/Market St	1974	£5,287,208			£5,287,208
1b	Market Hall (Cinema)	Market Street	1974	£2,357,399			£2,357,399
1c	Lower Market Hall (shop/offices)	Market Street	1974	£212,799			£212,799
2	Granite Shelter	Simmons Park	1907	£9,115			£9,115
3	Mayor's Shelter	Simmons Park	2002	£22,440			£22,440
3a	Timber Shelter	Simmons Park	u/k	£0			£0
4	Park Keepers Office	Simmons Park	2002	£30,856			£30,856
5	Tin Workshop	Simmons Park		£30,856			£30,856
6	Millennium (Jubilee) Bridge	Simmons Park	2002	£0			£0
7	Pond Pumps	Simmons Park	2002	£0			£0
8	Band Stand (by Parklands Leisure Centre)	Simmons Park	2009	£63,275			£63,275
8a	Band Stand (by Chalet)	Simmons Park	30/07/2023	£11,324			£11,324
9	Clapps Wood	Off Wesbridge Street Land off South Church Street	2011	£6,703			£6,703
10	Okehampton Cemetery		20/06/2006	£4,000			£4,000
11	Skate Park/BMX Track Complex	Off North Street		£1			£1
12	Fairplace Toilets	St James Street	01/04/2019	£1			£1
13	Fairplace Gardens	St James Street	01/04/2019	£1			£1
14	Land at Westbridge	West Street	01/04/2019	£1			£1
15	Land Behind Lidl		01/04/2019	£1			£1
17	Land adjacent to Pig Bridge and the Bridge	N.East of The Coach House, EX20 1EH	25/03/2002	£150			£150
18	Leased to Waitrose (DN454454)	School Way		£1			£1
19	Jim the Walker Statue	11 St James Street	2003	£8,850			£8,850
20	Land at Kempley Meadows	Simmons Park		£1			£1
21	Simmons Park Car-park	Simmons Park		£1			£1

				£8,044,983	£ -	£ -	£8,044,983
Investments							
20	Tamar Energy Community (5000 shares @ £1p/share)		27/10/2021	£5,000.00	£ -	£ -	£5,000.00
Contents Vehicles and Equipment							
21	Furniture, Tools, Equipment and IT	Town Hall and Charter Hall		£97,617	£		£102,789
22	Furniture and Equipment	Parks Office		£225	5,172		£225
23	Garden machinery and equipment	Simmons Park		£520			£520
24	Play Equipment	Simmons Park & Parklands		£268,404		£ 750	£267,654
	Play equipment	Skatepark complex		£0	£		£49,991
25	Telephone Kiosk (Type 6 Kiosk)	Simmons Park	13/10/2011	£1	49,991		£1
26	Vehicles and Attachments	Simmons Park		£35,265			£35,265
27	CCTV System	Simmons Park and Town		£36,721			£36,721
28	Street Furniture (Benches/Picnic Bench)			£8,859			£8,859
				£447,612	£	£ 750	£502,025
					55,163		
Community Assets							
30	Regalia, Artifacts and Silverware	Town Hall		£319,442	£		£324,707
31	Artwork (Paintings)	Town Hall		£69,252	5,265		£69,252
				£388,694	£	£ -	£393,959
					5,265		
				£8,886,289	£	£ 750	£8,945,967
					60,428		

Leased Property

34	Market Street Toilets	Market Street	01/12/2019
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13.4 2026/27 Budget – To note that a figure of £5,000 had not been pickup by a formula and therefore the total anticipated expenditure figure excludes this amount

	Actual	Budget	In Year	Budget	Actual at	Projected	Budget
	2024/25	2025/26	Adjustments	Total	01/11/2025	2025/26	2026/27
<u>Cemetery</u>							
Burial ground maintenance	-	500	-		-	500	-
Spoil Removal Cemetery Management and maintenance	240	500	-	-	-	300	500
Business Rates	122	130	-	-	122	122	130
Scattering Lawn	1,364	200	-	-	39	-	200
New Cemetery Provision	-	-	-	-	-	-	5,000
expenditure c	2,029	1,630	-	-	5,211	3,897	8,130

15. Cemetery – To note a matter arising from the Parks Committee in relation to the positioning of headstones following a recent inspection and action to be taken

Minute Reference 572.3 of a meeting of the Parks Committee held on 16th February 2026:

The council viewed a photograph of the misalignment of headstones in a row in the cemetery. On the proposition of Cllr Marsh, seconded by Cllr Colman it was RESOLVED write to the stone masons asking them to move the affected stones and to the families involved to keep them informed.