



Okehampton Town Council



Okehampton Town Council  
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## Annual Report 2025-2026



### **Cllr Richard Colman, Mayor of Okehampton**

Being the Mayor of Okehampton is an enlightening position to find yourself in. The organisations and people you get to meet, it's humbling.

Okehampton has not had an easy year, although I did get the honour of opening the newly revamped BMX pump track. Shortly after that the traffic control turmoil started and it has been very hard on our town and businesses. The council has worked hard to try to minimise the disruption as much as we can. Unfortunately, when it comes to highways there is very little we can do.



We have recently had confirmation that the Castle will be reopened thanks to a few volunteers. More volunteers are needed for it to be opened more often.

The loss of the Promise School is a real blow to the wider community, but we should be thankful that nobody was hurt. Our local fire service personnel did a fantastic job. They even managed to salvage a reasonable amount of resources and in doing so saved the lives of some tropical fish.

What was great to see though, was the response from the whole community, there were offers of help almost immediately. From free massages and food deliveries for fire service personnel, to offers of space for lessons moving forward. It really has shown Okehampton to be a close-knit community that knows how to pull together when faced with adversity.



Due to an inconvenient health issue my deputy Cllr Laura Bird had to step up – she did a fabulous job and will make a wonderful Mayor. I'm very proud of our town and all it has to offer, and it's been an honour to serve as Mayor.

## **Budget and Precept 2026/27**

The budget is the total amount the Town Council is expecting to spend during 2026/27. The budget process commences with workshops when each committee reviews its current year's spending and considers future projects. Recommendations are then made to Full Council who finalise the budget and precept for the coming year in January.

The precept is the difference between the budget requirement and expected income and is included within your Council Tax bill. Details of how the money collected is distributed, is included within the bill, e.g. Devon and Cornwall Police, Devon and Somerset Fire, Devon County Council, West Devon Borough Council and Okehampton Town Council.

The Town Council's requirement for 2026/27 is:

Budget	£650,944
Less Income	<u>-£175,671</u>
Precept	£475,273

This is a precept increase of 1.88% or £3.77 per year (7p a week) for a Band D dwelling. For houses with a lower banding the increase will be less.

Details of the budget and financial position of the council is available on the website can be obtained from the office.

## **Allotments**

From September 2026 the Town Council will assume responsibility for the three allotment sites in Okehampton from Okehampton United Charity.

Information about this will be available on the Town Council website as plans progress.

## **Okehampton Town and Hamlets Boundary Change - 2027**

The boundary between Okehampton Town Council and Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council is changing in 2027.

These changes will only affect the eastern side of the town which will transfer from Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council to Okehampton Town Council. It does not include Brightly, Meldon or Southcott.

The precept amount within the total Council Tax Bill will be affected as a result of this change. This is the portion of the whole bill that is currently paid to Okehampton Town or Hamlets Parish Council.

Further information can be obtained by contacting the relevant clerks or obtained from the website of each council.

## **Parks Committee - Cllr Bob Tolley, Chairman**

Once again, through the hard work of parkkeeper James McGahey, his staff and volunteers the Park has been managed and maintained to such a high standard they retained internationally accredited recognition of Green Flag status, following a “mystery shopper” type inspection.

Can I congratulate Jacob, our apprentice for successfully completing his apprenticeship, and final exam with distinction last summer. He now joins our park staff as a full-time employee. We as a Town Council are conscious of the need to support youngsters and of a duty to give back to the community so we have taken on Sam as our third apprentice, last September.

During the last year the Parks team undertook the regular management of the horticultural seasons and their aesthetic appeal in Simmons Park, Skate park, Cemetery and many other open spaces. Their other duties include, playground equipment and safety, machinery equipment and maintenance. Extra projects throughout the year included BMX/Pump track refurbishment and landscaping, and a bicycle rack installed and Jubilee Bridge resurfaced in Simmons Park.

Ecological and educational events were also undertaken by the Parks team such as a moth and bat evening, river survey and the Big Garden Birdwatch which recorded new species in the park over winter, including Blackcaps and Siskins.

James reports the frog spawn has appeared later than usual, although there were plenty of baby newts and damselfly larvae in the ponds. At the time of writing, Okehampton has just recorded its 50<sup>th</sup> consecutive day of rain since January 1<sup>st</sup>.

The parks eroding riverbanks, still awaiting action from the Environment Agency last year, continue to suffer under the torrents of water from Dartmoor passing through. Subsidence has affected some footpaths and a large oak tree near Chalet Treloar has uprooted and fallen to the ground. Along with these unforeseen issues the park team still maintain and upkeep the Simmons Park and the other open spaces we already manage brilliantly and will now have to prepare for taking over the three allotment sites in September and look ahead to what open spaces our new town boundary and Local Government Reorganisation changes may bring.

I need to give a shout out to James McGahey, Neil Cleave, Jacob Peek and young Sam Carling for the brilliant job they do in “Soakhampton’s” often difficult conditions. Thank you

## **Policy & Resources Committee - Cllr Julie Yelland, Chairman**

The Policy & Resources Committee meets regularly throughout year and, during the financial year, £29,000 was set aside in the annual Budget which enabled the Council to give grants to local charities and not for profit organisations who support and provide services within our local community. Over the last few years, the Committee has found that funding requests have far exceeded the amount of money that is available. To this end, we are looking into how we can make the process smoother while ensuring decisions can be made as fairly as possible.

The Budget setting process starts in August with all members being invited to workshops where a draft budget is scrutinised on a line-by-line basis. This process enables all Councillors to put forward ideas for improving efficiencies and it is at this point any unbudgeted new projects that have previously been formally agreed are included. Over the following five months, each Committee has opportunity to debate its own budget at least twice before the final version finally arrives with Policy & Resources in January where it is reviewed once again and a recommendation is made to Full Council who make the final decision.

The Council is an employer with all the associated responsibilities that go along with that and staffing matters sit within Policy & Resources. The Committee regularly reviews and refreshes the Council policies to ensure they remain legally compliant, relevant and fit for purpose. There are the usual policies that specifically relate to staff which any responsible employer should adopt together with policies that ensure the Council is transparent and fair in its dealings with members of the public. All are freely available on the Town Council website.

I remain, as ever, grateful to the members of the Committee for their hard work in reading copious amounts of paperwork, preparing for the meetings and turning up. We are very fortunate to have a dedicated, well qualified, team of staff who care deeply about Okehampton and are enthusiastic about the services that the Council delivers.

Thank you!

## **Planning Committee - Cllr Tony Leech, Chairman**

As with other years, I have pointed out that The Town Council are only consultees on any planning application that comes in for our town. We send our thoughts and recommendations to the WDBC Planning Department, **who are the main Planning Authority for our area**, and they include these in their final reports. These reports and

recommendations (for and against) are then discussed with the relevant Ward Members (WDBC Councillors). If the planning applications are reasonably straightforward, the Ward Member can agree that they can go through the **Delegated Powers route**. This allows the Planning Officer to negotiate / agree the planning permission with the applicant without it going to the full WDBC Planning Committee. If the WDBC Ward member thinks that the Officers recommendations are border line or go against any of the planning policies, the applications can then be called in to be debated by the full WDBC Planning Committee. However, the Ward Member must quote specific planning reasons for calling it in. It can't just be that no one likes the idea!! The WDBC Planning Committee will then make the final decision.

If they decline an application the Applicant can then take it to appeal. This is where an independent Inspector looks at the case from both sides and makes their decision. This is final and binding with no further appeal from either side. Unfortunately, the Inspectors are based in Bristol and only look at the facts of the case. It is becoming quite clear that the Inspectors are being told by Central Government that unless the applications are completely against the local and national planning policies, they are to approve them. That is why we all must make sure that all our ducks are in a row, and that we have only followed the policies as they stand now, otherwise, any developer worth their salt, will pull us apart and do whatever they want, wherever they want.

Unfortunately, in the last few months, Government have made changes to the National Planning Policy Framework, (NPPF) which means that West Devon must build twice as many houses as they had planned for each year under the present Joint Local Plan. This change came in without any warning, and as such, we find that West Devon does not now have the required five-year land supply, so we now must give a 'tilted balance' in favour of any development application. There are other changes coming that will completely change the whole of the NPPF, which may well mean that most planning applications will be decided by Planning Officers without any input of local views, and very large developments could end up being agreed via London.

We as a Town Council also must be very careful what we say and how we say it when it comes to planning applications. It is very easy to put your own personal views forward, but if they can be misconstrued, then developers can say that we have 'pre determined an application', and under these circumstances, the developer may get planning permission by default, so it is imperative that we keep our counsel, and as I have said before, look at each and every application on its own merits and within all

the policies that we have available to us. This could all change, as there may not be any local Planning Committees in the future.

Finally, we have heard that there are concerns about how shops etc can be turned into housing within our high streets that may have affected the vibrancy of the town. For some time now, under what is called permitted development, these can go ahead without a formal application or in consultation with the local planning committees, unless there are changes to the facades. Any changes to these in the conservation area must have conservation planning consent. Any changes without this, will, and does, bring enforcement action from West Devon Enforcement Officers.

### **Property Committee - Cllr Laura Bird, Chairman**

The Property Committee actively manages and maintains the Council's properties around the town. They support the ongoing projects such as updating and maintaining the Town Hall and also supporting new initiatives.

This past year we have employed Rosi Wills into the position of Facilities Officer with the role of overseeing the property the Town Council owns and is responsible for, and also advertising and supporting all those renting or using the facilities. Rosi has been a great addition to the Town Council staff team and enabled new ideas and vision to be discussed and implemented.

The improvements to the Town Hall continue to take shape as we update the building to meet the current fire regulations, plan to replace windows and doors, looking into becoming more environmentally aware with regards to efficiently heating the building and preserving the historic design and charm of the Town Hall.

We are currently working on a project to display historical artefacts we have collected over the years about Okehampton, the people, the previous Mayors and councillors, the projects and development that have been established. We hope to show case these throughout the year during Town Council events



## Grants Awarded

RBL (Poppy Wreath)	£50.00
Okehampton United Ecclesiastical Charity	£1,000.00
Museum of Dartmoor Life and Tourist Information	£3,500.00
Oke District Community Transport	£1,500.00
Oke Fairtrade Group	£90.00
Oke Armed Forces Veterans Breakfast Club	£300.00
Okehampton Hamlets PC	£200.00
All Saints Church Hall	£300.00
Hospiscare	£800.00
DYS Space (Room 13)	£300.00
Tor Support Services	£5,000.00
Ockment Centre	£4,000.00
Oke Carnival	£75.00
ORIG	£700.00
Oke Women's Institute	£500.00
OCRA	£455.60
Parkrun	£420.00
Okehampton Memories	£500.00
Citizens Advice	£5,000.00
Oke College PTFA	£300.00
Who Let the Dads Out	£500.00
Flagons and Dragons	£300.00
Okehampton Bid	£200.00
Okehampton Community Market	£277.94
Okehampton Hockey Club	£300.00
Okehampton Pads	£300.00
Okehampton Squash & Netball Club	£300.00
Transition Town Okehampton	£290.03

**£ 27,458.57**



## Grants Received

Rural England Prosperity Fund WDBC	£10,000
S106 BMX Track	£38,907.59
	<b>£48,907.59</b>

### Contact Us – 01837 53179

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**Rosi Wills**, Facilities Officer

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**James McGahey**, Park-Keeper

[parks@okehampton.gov.uk](mailto:parks@okehampton.gov.uk)

### Your Councillors

Cllr Richard Colman (Town Mayor)

Cllr Laura Bird (Deputy Mayor)

Cllr Terry Cummings

Cllr Christine Marsh

Cllr Allenton Fisher

Cllr David McNeill

VACANCY

Cllr Mark Richards

Cllr Carole Holt

Cllr Bob Tolley

Cllr Dr Michael Ireland

Cllr Simon Weekes

Cllr Tony Leech

Cllr Julie Yelland

Contact details available from the website  
or council office

## Councillor Attendance (14<sup>th</sup> May 2025 – 13<sup>th</sup> March 2026)

	Property		Policy & Resources		Planning		Parks		Full Council		attendance percentage	Personal	Work	Prior Commitment	Illness	Absent	Total Absences
	Meetings attended		Meetings attended		Meetings attended		Meetings attended		Meetings attended								
Colman	5	3	14	11	13	8	6	6	13	11	76.47	8.33	0.00	16.67	66.67	8.33	12
Bird	5	5	14	9	13	10	6	5	13	11	78.43	72.73	0.00	27.27	0.00	0.00	11
Tolley	5	5	14	12	13	11	6	6	13	13	92.16	0.00	0.00	50.00	50.00	0.00	4
Leech	5	5	14	14	13	13	6	6	13	13	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0
Yelland	5	4	14	13	13	13	6	5	13	12	92.16	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	4
Cummings	5	5	0	-	13	12	0	-	13	12	93.55	0.00	0.00	50.00	0.00	50.00	2
Fisher	5	4	10	6	-	-	-	-	13	10	71.43	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	8
Hart* Resigned 19 <sup>th</sup> January 2026	-		9	4	-	-	5	4	13	4	44.44	20.00	6.67	20.00	26.67	26.67	15
Holt	5	1	-	-	-	-	6	2	11	5	36.36	14.29	0.00	0.00	57.14	28.57	14
Ireland	-		-	-	13	11	6	6	13	11	87.50	25.00	0.00	0.00	75.00	0.00	4
McNeill	5	3	-	-			6	5	13	10	75.00	50.00	0.00	0.00	33.33	16.67	6
Marsh	-		10	8	-	-	6	5	13	10	79.31	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	6
Richards	5	4	-	-	13	13	-	-	13	13	96.77	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1
Weekes	-		10	2	-	-	6	3	13	5	34.48	10.53	21.05	0.00	52.63	15.79	19

