



Okehampton Town Council

Okehampton Town Council

Biodiversity Duty Policy

Okehampton Town Council recognises its duty under Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, as amended by the Environment Act 2021, to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing biodiversity in the exercise of its functions.

The Council is committed to supporting the long-term environmental, cultural and economic health and vitality of Okehampton and its surrounding area. Biodiversity underpins healthy ecosystems, contributes to climate resilience, supports public wellbeing, and enhances the character of the parish.

This policy supports the Climate Change and Biodiversity objectives contained within Okehampton Town Council's Strategic Plan 2023–2027.

The Council will consider opportunities to conserve and enhance biodiversity in all relevant aspects of its work and decision-making and will seek to contribute, where appropriate, to local and national nature recovery objectives.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Fulfil the Council's Biodiversity Duty.
- Identify opportunities to conserve and enhance biodiversity through the Council's functions.
- Guide decision-making relating to Council land, assets, services and activities.
- Promote biodiversity awareness within the community.
- Support nature recovery and environmental resilience within the parish.

When exercising its functions, Okehampton Town Council will seek opportunities to conserve and enhance biodiversity through:

Land and Asset Management

- Managing Council-owned land and assets in ways that support wildlife and habitat creation.
- Enhancing biodiversity within parks, open spaces, cemeteries and other Council-managed land.
- Considering biodiversity improvements when undertaking maintenance or improvement works.

Planning and Consultation

- Considering biodiversity impacts when responding to planning applications and planning policy consultations.
- Supporting Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirements and biodiversity enhancements in new developments.
- Encouraging sustainable drainage systems, green infrastructure and wildlife-friendly design.

Procurement and Operations

- Seeking sustainable and environmentally responsible suppliers wherever practicable.
- Considering biodiversity impacts in purchasing decisions.

- Reducing waste, energy consumption and pollution associated with Council operations.

Community Leadership and Engagement

- Supporting local environmental initiatives.
- Encouraging residents, community groups and businesses to participate in biodiversity projects.
- Raising awareness of biodiversity and nature recovery.

Local Nature Recovery Strategy

The Council will have regard to the Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy and any future revisions when published.

The Council will seek opportunities to support the priorities identified within the strategy where they align with Council responsibilities, landholdings and available resources.

The Council will also have regard to any future Species Conservation Strategies and Protected Site Strategies that may be relevant to the parish.

Biodiversity Objectives

The Council will seek to:

Thriving Plants and Wildlife

- Use native and sustainably sourced trees, shrubs and plants wherever appropriate.
- Create dedicated spaces for wildlife on Council-managed land.
- Leave dead wood safely in place where appropriate to provide habitat.
- Maintain newly planted trees and hedgerows to improve establishment and survival rates.
- Reduce the use of herbicides, pesticides, peat and water wherever practicable.
- Prevent the spread of invasive non-native species and plant diseases.
- Improve habitat connectivity and nature corridors across the parish.
- Protect and enhance habitats for protected and priority species.

Clean Air

- Promote sustainable transport and active travel opportunities.
- Support measures that improve local air quality.
- Consider the environmental impacts of planning applications affecting the parish.
- Encourage energy-efficient and low-carbon development.

Clean and Plentiful Water

- Promote sustainable water use on Council-managed land.
- Avoid planting schemes that require excessive water consumption.
- Support measures that protect local watercourses and aquatic habitats.
- Encourage sustainable drainage and natural flood management measures.

Managing Exposure to Chemicals and Pollution

- Ensure chemicals used by the Council or its contractors are managed safely and responsibly.
- Minimise the use of harmful chemicals wherever suitable alternatives exist.
- Request environmental policy statements from contractors where appropriate.
- Promote environmentally sustainable grounds maintenance practices.

Maximising Resources and Minimising Waste

- Minimise the use of non-recyclable and single-use materials at Council events.
- Use compostable or recyclable materials wherever practical.

- Promote waste reduction and recycling across Council operations.
- Reduce unnecessary food waste at Council events.
- Encourage resource efficiency and sustainable consumption.

Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

- Support environmental projects and initiatives within the community.
- Increase tree planting where appropriate.
- Consider the environmental impacts and carbon footprint of goods and services procured by the Council.
- Encourage suppliers who demonstrate strong environmental credentials.

Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

- Support measures that increase resilience to climate change.
- Consider future flood risk when responding to planning consultations.
- Promote nature-based solutions including tree planting and habitat creation.
- Encourage development that contributes towards carbon reduction and climate resilience.

Reducing Environmental Hazards

- Encourage sustainable drainage systems in new developments.
- Promote awareness of flooding risks and resilience measures.
- Support initiatives that reduce wildfire risk.
- Encourage registration for flood warning services where appropriate.

Enhancing Biosecurity and Nature Recovery

- Install and maintain bird, bat and other wildlife boxes where appropriate.
- Encourage green roofs and green walls on suitable buildings.
- Plant native trees, hedgerows and wildflowers for pollinators.
- Protect and enhance habitats for protected species.
- Tackle invasive non-native species.
- Promote healthy ecosystems and resilient habitats.
- Value and protect green spaces within the parish, including Simmons Park and other important community green spaces.

Heritage, Landscape and Wellbeing

- Protect the character, identity and rural setting of the parish.
- Conserve and enhance the natural, geological and cultural heritage of the area.
- Support access to nature and outdoor recreation.
- Recognise the benefits of nature for physical and mental wellbeing.
- Continue monitoring and promoting public rights of way and access routes.

Council Buildings and Facilities

The Council will seek opportunities to improve biodiversity through the management of its buildings by:

- Timing maintenance works to minimise disturbance to wildlife.
- Considering biodiversity before removing vegetation.
- Reducing unnecessary external lighting where appropriate.
- Improving water and energy efficiency.
- Incorporating biodiversity enhancements into building improvement projects where feasible.

Education and Awareness

The Council will:

- Promote biodiversity awareness through its communications and events.
- Support community participation in biodiversity projects.

- Encourage residents to manage gardens and green spaces in wildlife-friendly ways.
- Support biodiversity education opportunities where practical.
- Encourage councillors and staff to consider biodiversity when making decisions.

6. Monitoring and Reporting

The Council will maintain a record of biodiversity actions undertaken and review progress annually.

Progress may be reported through:

- Committee reports.
- Strategic Plan monitoring.
- Environmental action plans.
- Other relevant Council reports and publications.

The Council will consider opportunities to establish measurable biodiversity targets where resources allow.

This policy will be reviewed annually and formally reconsidered at least every five years in accordance with the Biodiversity Duty requirements.

The Council may review the policy sooner if there are significant legislative, environmental or organisational changes.



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Data Security Breach Response Policy and Procedure

Introduction

A data security breach can happen for a number of reasons: Loss or theft of data or equipment on which data is stored, inappropriate access controls allowing unauthorised use, equipment failure, human error, unforeseen circumstances such as a fire or flood, hacking attack, 'blagging' offences where information is obtained by deceiving the organisation who holds it.

A breach can happen in many ways, the following list describes some of the most common, but is not exhaustive:

- Theft or loss of an unencrypted laptop computer or other unencrypted portable electronic/digital media holding names, addresses, dates of birth and National Insurance Numbers of individuals.
- ~~A manual paper-based filing system (or unencrypted digital media) holding the personal data relating to named individuals and their financial records etc.~~
- Sending or copying an email to an unintended recipient
- Accessing of records for no proper legitimate purpose
- Improper deletion or alteration of records

More information can be found using the link: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/gdpr-resources/pdhl> <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/report-a-breach/personal-data-breach/personal-data-breaches-a-guide/>

Who does this procedure apply to?

If you work for the Council, whether as an employee, contractor or in any other way, then this procedure applies to you. Councillors are also required to conduct themselves in accordance with this procedure.

What to do if a data breach is known or suspected

If you have reason to believe that a data breach has or may have happened you must complete a Data Breach Report Form as fully as possible and as soon as possible. The completed form must be sent to the Town Clerk, or in their absence the Assistant Clerk.

Responding to a Data Breach Report

On receipt of a Data Breach Report Form the Town Clerk, or Assistant Town Clerk, will invoke and follow the procedure as set out in Appendix 1, the responsibility for which may be delegated to the Assistant Town Clerk by the Town Clerk.

The incident will then be reported to the next meeting of Full Council or Policy and Resources Committee, whichever sooner.

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APPENDIX 1

**Okehampton Town Council
Data Breach Report Form**

Details of Breach (Describe briefly what has happened or how the data breach arose with dates and times where possible)	
Nature and content of data involved (Describe the type(s) of personal information involved, <u>e.g.</u> email addresses, payroll information etc)	
Number of individuals affected	
Name of person making this report	
How and to whom this report was submitted	
Date and time this report was submitted	
Date and time of Notification of Breach	
Notification of Breach received from	

How and when report acknowledged	
Details of person investigating	
Any further information about the breach	
Information Commissioner informed, if relevant Time and method of report and by whom https://report.ico.org.uk/security-breach/ https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/report-a-breach/	
Police informed if relevant Time and method of report and by whom	

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Individuals contacted How many individuals contacted? Method of contact used? Does the breach affect individuals in other EU member states? What are the potential consequences and adverse effects on those individuals? Confirm that the details of the nature of the risk to the individuals affected, any measures they can take to safeguard against it, and the likely cost to them of taking those measures is relayed to the individuals involved	
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Staff briefed	
Assessment of ongoing risk	
Containment Actions: what technical and organisational security measures have you applied (or were to be applied) to the affected personal data	
Recovery Plan	
Evaluation and response, to include notification of the Full Council	



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Honorary Freeman (Freewoman) Policy

Policy Statement

The Town Council wishes to recognise the efforts of members of the community who demonstrate outstanding commitment to the well-being of Okehampton. The Council will do this, in special circumstances that meet the criteria of this policy, by awarding the title of Honorary Freeman (or Freewoman) of Okehampton.

This honour will be awarded only on rare and exceptional occasions and stands apart from the annual mayoral award presentations made at the Mayor Choosing ceremony.

Background

Before the municipal reforms of 1835, there was a class of persons known as “freemen” in old corporate boroughs, enjoying special rights in the corporate property. The right to be admitted a freeman rested upon the custom of the borough, varied by the terms of its charter and, in certain cases, by local statutory provision.

Generally, the admission of a freeman, as distinct from the conferment of the honour of an honorary freedom, might be acquired, inter alia, by marriage, birth or employment to an existing freeman. The effect of successive reforms of local government law has been to continue the custom of maintaining a roll of freemen and regulating admission to it.

Pursuant to section 248 of the Local Government Act 1972 Act (the 1972 Act) as amended by section 27 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (the 2009 Act,) the admission of freemen (as opposed to admitting honorary freemen and honorary freewomen) of a pre-1974 municipal borough is approved by the chairman of the district council of the district in which the former borough lies.

After local government reorganisation in 1974, a number of local authorities were given the power to admit honorary aldermen and freemen pursuant to section 249 of the 1972 Act. However, that power was not extended to parish councils in England or community councils in Wales.

Prior to January 2010 only 10 local councils had the standing to confer the title of honorary freeman; seven in England (the councils of the cathedral cities of Chichester, Ely, Hereford, Lichfield, Ripon, Truro and Wells) and 3 in Wales (the councils of the cities of Bangor and St David's and the Royal Town of Caernarfon).

On the 12th January 2010 the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 amended the provisions of the 1972 Act to enable all local councils to confer honorary titles. By virtue of section 249 (5)-(10) of the 1972 Act as amended, all local councils may exercise powers to confer the title of “honorary freeman” or “honorary freewoman,” to persons of distinction and those who in the council's opinion have rendered eminent service to the council's area.

Section 249(8) of the 1972 Act as amended provides that the admission of an honorary freeman or honorary freewoman must be by resolution made at a meeting of the full council specially convened for such purpose and passed by no less than two-thirds of the members of the council. Section 249(8) also requires “notice of the object of the meeting” to be given.

This confirms the need for the agenda with the public notice and summons to members in respect of the council meeting to itemise a motion to confer the title of honorary freeman or honorary freewoman.

Section 249(9) of the 1972 Act as amended provides that a local council may spend a reasonable sum as it thinks fit for the purpose of presenting an address or a casket containing an address to a person on whom it has conferred the title of honorary freeman or honorary freewoman.

Prior to the changes in the law, as set out above, some local councils, who want to honour local residents' notable service to their town or community or who achieved national fame, conferred the titles "honorary citizen" or "honorary townsman" or "honorary burgess". Given the express powers given by the 2009 Act to admit "honorary freemen" and "honorary freewomen" it will no longer be necessary or even possible for local councils to confer other titles.

Nomination Criteria

The following will be taken into account when consideration is given to granting the honour of Honorary Freeman (or Freewoman) of Okehampton:

1. Preference will be given to a person who performs in a voluntary capacity, but this should not preclude the honour being awarded to a person whose dedication and contribution is significantly above that expected for their occupation.
2. All nominees should have carried out their largely voluntary roles for a period of at least 20 years.
3. Nominees need not necessarily be resident within the Okehampton Town Council area.
4. Any nominated Town Councillor should have retired from the post.
5. The contribution to the community of Okehampton should involve one or more of the following:
 - a) A significant allocation of the person's time in serving members of the community for the improvement of their well-being.
 - b) The promotion, achievement and/or delivery of community services in which a real personal contribution has been made.
 - c) A contribution which is seen to stand above the contributions of most others.

Nomination Procedure

1. Nominations should be made in the strictest confidence without the nominee's knowledge. Any resident or elector of Okehampton may make a nomination but it must be sponsored by a Town Councillor.
2. Nominations must be made in writing to the Town Clerk and supported by evidence of the voluntary service provided by the individual to the community and any other examples of service which justifies the honour. On receipt of a nomination it will be circulated to all Councillors for confidential consideration at a meeting of full Council.
3. If Councillors are in agreement by resolution at a meeting of full Council that the nominee should be made an Honorary Freeman (or Freewoman) of Okehampton, the nominee will be invited to accept the honour. If agreed, the nomination will then be put before the Council and a formal vote taken, again in confidence.
4. No fewer than two-thirds (rounded up) of the Town Councillors must agree the nomination.
5. The decisions of the Council on all nominations are final.

Entitlement

Any person nominated may designate himself/herself Honorary Freeman (or Freewoman) of Okehampton. The award will normally be made at a full Council meeting. A scroll will be presented to the recipient.

Okehampton Town Council

Review of Effectiveness of Internal Controls – ~~March 2025~~October 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 be regularly reviewed, fit for purpose, and adhered to.	~~The Policy & Resources Committee will review the new model Financial Regulations, as prepared by the National Association of Local Councils, in March 2025 and make recommendation to Council for adoption in May 2025.~~ ~~The Financial regulations were re adopted in March 2026 and will be reviewed in March 2027~~ Standing Orders were re-adopted in ~~March 2024~~ April 2026 and will be reviewed in ~~March 2025~~ April 2027.
Safe and Effective arrangements to Safeguard Public Money. (Including the segregation of duties)	A council needs to have practical and resilient arrangements covering making payments, and handling receipts. Authorities need to have in place safe and efficient arrangements to safeguard public money.	Procedures for the safe and effective safeguarding of public money are set out in Financial Regulations. 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, Committees and ultimately the Council. The system is robust and transparent for staff, members and residents. ~~The new version due for consideration and adoption by the Council in May 2025 will include delegation to other Officers.~~ 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. The Council should consider if this Internal Control measure is adequate.
Effectiveness arrangements to manage the	Every authority needs to arrange for the proper administration of its financial affairs and ensure that one	At Okehampton Town Council, the Clerk has been appointed as the RFO. The Clerk is CiLCA qualified and working towards the Community

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Council's finances.	of its officers (the RFO) has formal responsibility for those affairs	Governance degree at Level 6 having successfully completed Levels 4 and 5. The Finance Officer ~~is in the process of completing~~ <u>has completed</u> <u>FILCA</u> .
Regular Financial Reporting	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. 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. Regular budget reports detailing expected and actual expenditure against budget are also required.	The Policy and Resources Committee meet approximately bi-monthly. Monthly comprehensive financial management reports are provided to every meeting. This includes: • Budget Report • Bank Reconciliation • Reserves 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, standing orders and any payments made by debit card held by the Clerk <u>or Finance Officer</u>.
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.	The Council reviews its Financial Risk Assessment at least annually in May and other risks throughout the year. The Council's precept for ~~2025~~ <u>2026/26</u> is ~~£457,313~~ <u>£457,313</u> ~~475,273~~. 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.
Internal Control Regular Review	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	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.

	to and helps identify areas for development at an early stage. Simple checks conducted by members, can provide reassurance to a council and other stakeholders that Internal Control measures are adhered to.	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.
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.	IAC Audit and Consultancy have been appointed by the Council to undertake internal audits twice yearly. ~~2024~~2026/257 is the last second of a three-year agreement and will be reviewed by the council following the year end audits. <u>The internal auditors independence and competency is considered upon appointment and review.</u> 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.
Training and Awareness	Staff and members should understand their role and responsibilities in relation to financial control	A stakeholder survey could be used to identify any training needs of staff and Members. "Training" could include briefings from the Clerk, reading "The Good Councillors Guide to Finance" as well as formal training sessions. <u>A survey will be undertaken in the 2025/268 financial year, after council elections see example at Appendix A.</u>
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.

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Appendix A

Review of Internal Controls – Stakeholder Feedback

This survey should be completed anonymously but if you feel this survey has highlighted any training needs or knowledge gaps please speak to the Clerk.

About you and your role at the council

1. What is your role at the council?
 - a. Officer
 - b. Councillor
2. If you are a councillor, do you have any special responsibilities e.g. Mayor/Deputy Mayor or chair of a committee (Please specify)
3. Are you a bank signatory
Yes No
4. Have you undertaken any training for your role as a Town Councillor?
 - a. Yes, and it has improved my understanding of my role
 - b. Yes, but I am still unclear on my responsibilities
 - c. No, but I have a clear understanding of my role
 - d. No, and I think training would assist me
5. Have you undertaken any specific training on Local Council Finance or Internal Audit?
 - a. Yes, and it has improved my understanding of my role
 - b. Yes, but I am still unclear on my responsibilities
 - c. No, but I have a clear understanding of my role
 - d. No, and I think training would assist me

6. How would you rate your understanding of the following documents, policies and processes

	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
Financial Regulations				
Bank Reconciliation				
Risk Assessments				
The Council's Budget				
The Annual Governance and Accountability Return				
Payment Controls				

7. How helpful do you find the reports from your Internal Auditor
 - a. Very helpful they have helped us improve our systems and services
 - b. Somewhat helpful they have highlighted areas we need to consider
 - c. Neither helpful nor unhelpful the reports ensure we meet our statutory requirements
 - d. I am not familiar with the Internal Auditors reports

8. Do you have any other comments to make?

If you have identified any training needs, please either provide your name on this document or speak to the Town Clerk so that these can be addressed.



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IT Policy

1. Introduction

Okehampton Town Council recognises the importance of effective and secure information technology (IT) and email usage in supporting its business, operation and communication.

This policy outlines the guidelines and responsibilities for the appropriate use of IT resources and email by council members, employees, volunteers and contractors.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all individuals who use Okehampton Town Council's IT resources, including computers, networks, software, devices, data and email accounts.

3. Acceptable use of IT resources and email

Okehampton Town Council IT resources and email accounts are to be used for official council-related activities and tasks. All users must adhere to ethical standards, respect copyright and intellectual property rights, and avoid accessing inappropriate or offensive content.

4. Device and software usage

Where possible, authorised devices, software, and applications will be provided by Okehampton Town Council for work-related tasks.

Unauthorised installation of software on authorised devices, including personal software, is strictly prohibited due to security concerns.

5. Data management and security

All sensitive and confidential Okehampton Town Council data should be stored and transmitted securely using approved methods. Regular data backups should be performed to prevent data loss, and secure data destruction methods should be used when necessary.

6. Network and internet usage

Okehampton Town Council's network and internet connections should be used responsibly and efficiently for official purposes. Downloading and sharing copyrighted material without proper authorisation is prohibited.

7. Email communication

Email accounts provided by Okehampton Town Council are for official communication only. Emails should be professional and respectful in tone. Confidential or sensitive information must not be sent via email unless it is encrypted.

Be cautious with attachments and links to avoid phishing and malware. Verify the source before opening any attachments or clicking on links.

8. Password and account security

Okehampton Town Council users are responsible for maintaining the security of their accounts and passwords. Passwords should be strong and not shared with others. Regular password changes are encouraged to enhance security. Passwords must be different for each account or programme – a generic password must not be used.

9. Mobile devices and remote working

Mobile devices provided by Okehampton Town Council should be secured with passcodes and/or biometric authentication. When working remotely, users should follow the same security practices as if they were in the office.

Parks and Facilities tablets, which are used for inspection purposes, have their own Microsoft account which are not linked to Town Council files. Data from these is downloaded regularly.

10. Email monitoring

Okehampton Town Council reserves the right to monitor email communications to ensure compliance with this policy and relevant laws. Monitoring will be conducted in accordance with the Data Protection Act and GDPR.

11. Backups

There are four copies of council data stored in different locations on different devices. Each morning an AME IT technician checks notifications for successful backups, any that have failed or warnings against them which will prompt the engineer to report for investigation and appropriate action. A record of all backups is kept by the contractor.

The following data backup system is in place:

- Daily Full 365 backup to the councils IT contractor - all 365 data including mailboxes and teams channels. Storage is onsite at the contractor's location.
- 2 x daily 365 active backups to local NAS – all 365 data including mailboxes and teams channels, stored in local Synology NAS.
- Weekly hyper backup 365 to USB – all 365 data including mailboxes and teams channels. Storage is on an external USB drive which is alternated on a bi-weekly schedule and stored securely.

12. Retention and archiving

Emails should be retained and archived in accordance with legal and regulatory requirements. Regularly review and delete unnecessary emails to maintain an organised inbox.

13. Reporting security incidents

All suspected security breaches or incidents should be reported immediately to the designated IT point of contact for investigation and resolution. Report any email-related security incidents or breaches to the IT administrator, the Town Clerk, immediately.

13 Training and awareness

Okehampton Town Council will provide regular training and resources to educate users about IT security best practices, privacy concerns, and technology updates. All employees and councillors will have access to training on email security and best practices.

14. Compliance and consequences

Breach of this Policy may result in the suspension of IT privileges and further consequences as deemed appropriate

14. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure its relevance and effectiveness. Updates may be made to address emerging technology trends and security measures.

15. Contacts

For IT-related enquiries or assistance, users can contact the Town Clerk or the councils IT contractor.

All staff and councillors are responsible for the safety and security of Okehampton Town Council's IT and email systems. By adhering to this Policy, Okehampton Town Council aims to create a secure and efficient IT environment that supports its mission and goals.



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Reserves (Financial) Policy

Introduction

Okehampton Town Council is required to maintain adequate financial reserves to meet the needs of the organisation. The purpose of this policy is to set out how the Council will determine and review the level of reserves it holds.

Types of Reserves

Okehampton Town Council maintains two types of reserves:

Earmarked Reserves

This provides a means of accumulating or specifying funds, for use in a later financial year, to meet known or planned initiatives. The purpose of an Earmarked Reserve is to set aside amounts for projects that extend beyond one year or as a contingency against a specific situation occurring.

Earmarked Reserves will increase through resolutions of the Council and will decrease as they are spent on their specific intended purposes.

Where expenditure is planned in future accounting periods, it is prudent to build up reserves in advance. When an Earmarked Reserve is established, a clear reason/purpose should be set out. It is the responsibility of the Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) to ensure funds are spent in line with their purpose. The purpose of each Earmarked Reserve should be reviewed annually to ensure that it is still relevant.

There is no limit on the amount of Earmarked Reserves that can be held except that the reason must be for genuine intended purposes.

General Reserves

This represents the unallocated balance of Council funds.

The main purposes of the General Reserves are firstly to operate as a working balance to help manage the impact of uneven cash flow and secondly, to provide a contingency to cushion the impact of emerging or unforeseen events or genuine emergencies, a good example of this being the COVID-19 Pandemic. In general, a robust level of reserve should be maintained and take account of operational and financial issues facing the Town Council.

A well-run authority with a prudent approach to setting its budget will each year consider its level of General Reserves. These General Reserves will also need to be supported by Earmarked Reserves for specific needs, contingencies and commitments. In assessing the level of the Town Council's reserves, account needs to be taken of the risks facing the Council in terms of any significant unforeseen expenditure requirements.

The primary means of building a General Reserve ~~will be~~ is through the reallocation of funds e.g. where a project comes in under budget or through an allocation from the annual budget.

It is recommended in the 'Accountability and Governance Practitioners' Guide' to hold between 3 and 12 months expenditure¹ as a General Reserve. However, if the general reserve is too high the level will need to be justified to the external auditor.

The level of the General Reserve ~~should be~~ is reviewed each year as part of the budgeting process. Balancing the annual budget by drawing on reserves must be viewed as a legitimate short-term option only. Such reserves must not be deployed to finance recurrent expenditure.

Budget Assumptions and Risk

When budgeting and reviewing reserve requirements the council must make assumptions and assess possible identifiable risks which include the following:

- The level of inflation and interest rates
- Salary and benefit reviews negotiated by the National Joint Council for Local Government Services
- Loss of staff
- The level and timing of revenue and capital receipts
- Planned efficiency savings/gains
- Financial risks inherent in any new project
- Legislation changes
- One-off events
- Demand led pressures
- Uninsurable losses
- Availability of other funding sources e.g. grants
- Potential capping of Town Council precept by central government

The Council undertakes an annual Financial Risk Assessment and has insurance in place to protect against possible identifiable insurable losses.

Review of Reserves

Annually as part of the budget and precept setting process, Okehampton Town Council ~~will~~ reviews both its Earmarked and General Reserves. This review ~~will~~ include:

- The ongoing requirement for each of the Earmarked Reserves and the allocated amount set aside
- The ~~existing~~ level of General Reserves ~~and the level~~ it will aim to hold in the upcoming financial year
- The potential risks including from loss of significant self-generated income

For the ~~2027/28~~ financial year Okehampton Town Council will aim to hold the equivalent of four months precept as a General Reserve, plus the budgeted income of £80,000 from Waitrose Carpark which the Council considers to be significant self-generated income which would pose a significant risk if lost.

¹ Net Revenue Expenditure – effectively the Precept



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Okehampton Town Council

Snow and Ice Management Policy

This policy is in accordance with a resolution made by the Parks Committee on 11th February 2019. The policy sets out how snow and ice within Simmons Park and other outdoor areas which are the responsibility of the council will be managed as reasonably possible if members of staff are able to safely access the relevant sites and equipment.

Simmons Park

Footpaths

On being advised of imminent snow/icy conditions temporary warning signage will be strategically placed at the pedestrian entrance, at both sides of the bridges and other prominent areas of the park, advising caution as paths may be slippery and untreated.

Being the area within the council's responsibility which has the highest footfall and most likely to be frequented by members of the public during periods of snow, the pathway from the pedestrian entrance gate to Chalet Treloar and across Jubilee Bridge into the car park will be cleared of snow and gritted, as much as reasonably possible and if members of staff are able to make their way safely to the site.

Grit spread on Jubilee Bridge will be kept to a minimum to reduce the risk of it washing into the river.

Carpark

If staff are able to safely attend the site, temporary warning signage will be strategically placed at the entrance to the carpark.

It will not be possible to clear snow or grit from the carpark or its access roadway due to staff capacity and if it is felt necessary the carpark will be closed. This being the decision of any member of staff who is able to make it to the site, access and erect the signage.

Clapps Wood

The pathway will not be cleared of snow or gritted.

On being advised of imminent snow/icy conditions temporary warning signage will be fixed to the gate at each end of the pathway through the woods.

Fairplace Garden and Public Toilets

The pathway in front of and entrance to the public toilets at Fairplace and Market Street will be cleared of snow and gritted, as much as reasonably possible and if members of staff are able to make their way safely to the site.

On being advised of imminent snow/icy conditions temporary warning signage will be placed as near as possible to the entranceways.

Other Areas

It will not be possible to clear snow or grit, or place signage in other areas, including the skate park, council parking area in Market Street and Council owned Cemetery adjacent to All Saints Church, and these will be left untreated.

