

ANNUAL REPORT



2020/2021

Chard Town Council

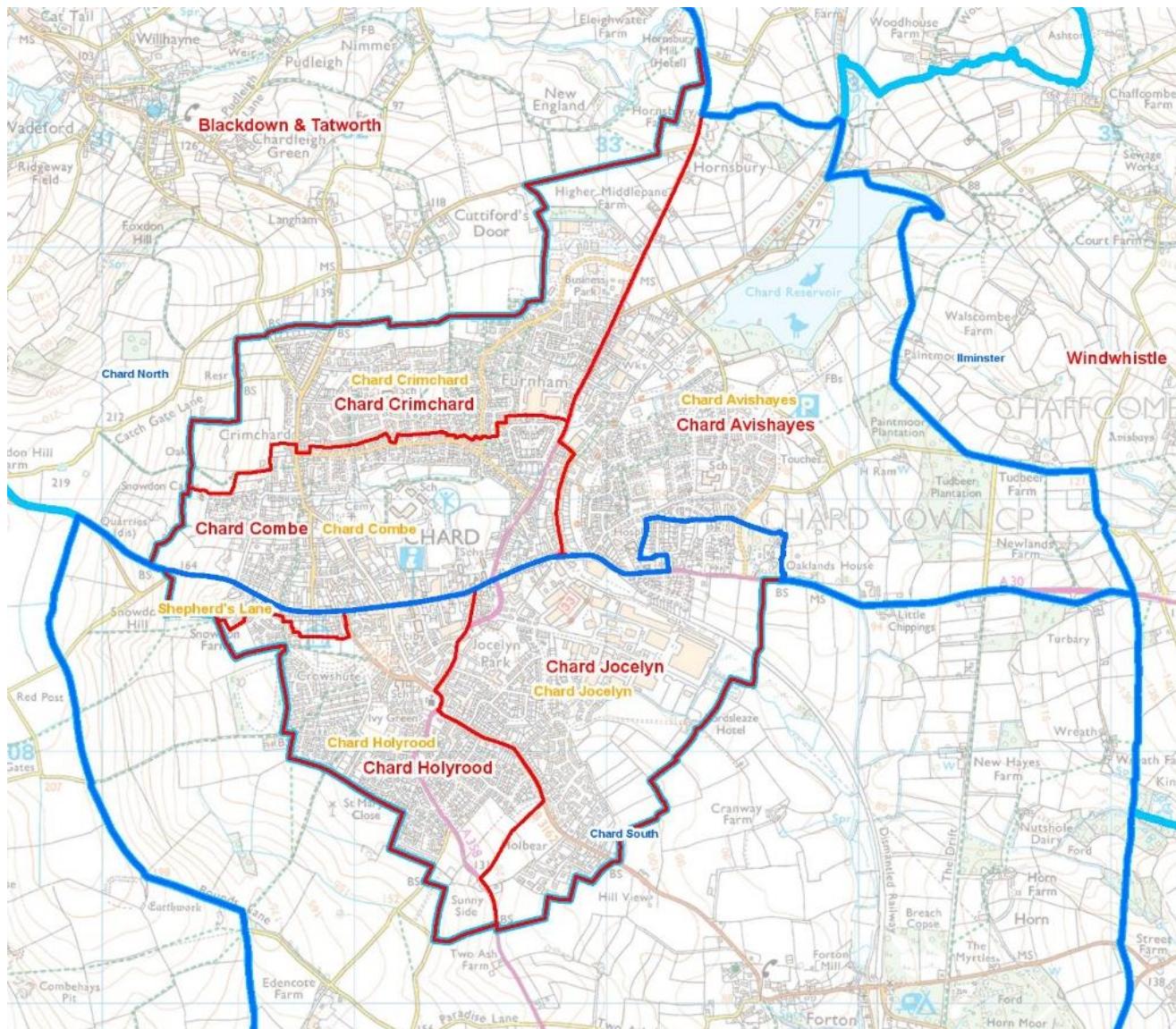


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Ward Boundary Map

Chard Town Council has 15 Councillors representing six wards of Chard The map below includes the boundaries of each ward:



The Mayor's Report

Cllr Jason Baker



I am very proud to be Mayor of Chard and to represent our town.

The previous year has been a very busy one for Chard Town Council despite of and because of the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions. The financial year commenced in lockdown and the Town Council had to put in place the infrastructure to hold remote meetings. Whilst the Amenities and Guildhall Team continued to work onsite the Office staff were required to work remotely.

The Town Council hosted the Chard Covid-19 Support Group in the Guildhall Auditorium. The Group supported many local people through the first lockdown and have continued to do so.

The Town Council has faced several challenges especially with regard to staffing. The previous Town Clerk departed in July 2020 and a Locum Clerk was appointed to enable Council to undertake a complete organisational and staffing structure review. This was completed by the end of the financial year and is now being implemented.

The Town Council has been monitoring the situation with the introduction of a unitary authority structure in Somerset. In July 2021 Central Government adopted the proposal for a single unitary authority for Somerset, we will keep everyone updated on this as time goes on.

The Town Council has successfully applied for several grants of over £150k from

- Heritage England
- Somerset County Council Climate Change Fund
- South Somerset District Council's Market Towns Investment Group (MTIG)
- the Welcome Back Fund

We have worked in partnership with the district council on the town centre improvements and are looking forward to the opening of the new Leisure centre, Chard has received around £20 million investment, and I would like to thank fellow councillors and officers who have made this possible.

The Town Council is about to commence works on upgrading Ashcroft Park and Jocelyn Park and continues to deliver the street cleaning contract in the town centre as well as its other responsibilities including grass cutting, weed spraying, bin emptying and reactive works.

We have not seen many of the events that are usually held in the town centre, but I am pleased that we will be seeing the Carnival return to our streets in October as well as the Halloween event and Christmas lights event in November.

It has been amazing to see how our town has come together over the last 18 months and how the community spirit has shone through. I look forward to seeing many of you at future events within the town and strongly believe that Chard will have a bright and prosperous future.

Town Clerk's Report

2020/2021 has been a very challenging year for Chard Town Council. A number of staff changes and the Covid-19 pandemic has created an unsettled environment with some staff working from home whilst others carrying on as normal. However, despite all these issues, the Town Council is emerging from a period previously unprecedented in a stronger, healthier position.

Following the departure of the previous Town Clerk, Mr Andrew Gunn, I took over initially as Locum Clerk to enable the Council to review its current structure, identify areas where necessary investment was required and take advantage of the many opportunities that presented themselves, especially with regard to grant funding.

Whilst much has been achieved and many projects commenced there is still a very long way to go. The implementation of a single unitary authority for Somerset, which is expected to come into being with a shadow authority following elections in May 2022, will present further challenges and opportunities for Chard Town Council, but we are committed to working in partnership with the existing principal authorities and the future principal authority to ensure Chard achieves the best outcome possible.

I would like to thank all the staff team at Chard Town Council for making me feel welcome and for their support as we have steered through some fairly choppy waters over the past twelve months.

I would also like to thank our Councillors for making me feel very welcome as well and helping me to understand the intricacies and foibles of Chard Town Council. Change has been the focus and a great deal has been achieved.

The Town of Chard has a very bright future ahead of it. It has attracted significant investment and much of this will be delivered within the next six months, especially with regard to the public realm.

The Town Council will continue to do its best to deliver high quality services, react to requests from the community and to build on its previous achievements.

Paul Russell
Town Clerk

Overview 2020/2021

The previous year has been a very busy one for Chard Town Council despite and because of the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions.

The financial year commenced with the country in lockdown following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. This created a number of issues for local government including the inability to hold meetings remotely. The Coronavirus Act addressed this and enabled local councils to meet remotely for one year to continue to make decisions and deliver services.

The Town Council introduced remote meetings using the Zoom platform. This new way of working was quickly adopted and the meetings were recorded and uploaded onto YouTube to help increase transparency and accessibility. In future the Town Council will be investigating the use of hybrid meetings and is currently awaiting the outcome of the recent consultation on this subject by Central Government.

The Office staff were required to work from home and continued to deliver the administrative side of the Council, dealing with issues raised and ensuring that all financial matters were addressed.

The Amenities Team continued to carry out the street cleaning contract, emptying bins, ensuring parks and open spaces were kept in good condition to enable residents to use them for their daily exercise, upgrading and refurbishing street furniture and dealing with any reactive issues including fly tipping, which has been on the increase.

The Guildhall hosted the successful Covid-19 Support Group which was set up in May 2020 and continued through until the end of July 2020. The Caretaking Team ensured the building was kept clean and well ventilated and dealt with any building issues experienced by the Support Group.

The previous Town Clerk, Mr Gunn, left the Council in July 2020 and a Locum Clerk was appointed to provide some business continuity. He commenced in July 2020 and was recently appointed on a permanent basis.

A proposal to create a Unitary Authority for Somerset was announced by Central Government. Two alternative options were developed by the District Councils and the County Council. The results of this were announced in July 2021 when the proposal for a single unitary authority for Somerset was adopted by the Government.

The Town Council undertook a full staffing restructure and comprehensive organisational review during the year to prepare for the transition to unitary authority for Somerset and to ensure the Town Council was fit for purpose moving forward. This was carried out by an external consultant and formally adopted. The recommendations of the review are currently being implemented, including a recruitment drive.

The Town Council endeavoured to reopen the Guildhall for use by a small number of hirers as soon as it was practicable to do so. The lack of clarity regarding the rules and restrictions were challenging at times but many groups returned to the Guildhall.

The Town Council set a holding budget for 2021/22 to enable it to assess the impact of the Pandemic and to begin to build again for the future. Financial liabilities may increase following the implementation of a unitary authority but it is hoped that income generating services may also be devolved to help address any increase in expenditure.

Council continued to deliver the street cleaning contract on behalf of South Somerset District Council and increased cleaning to help prevent the spread of Covid-19.

Chard Cemetery continued to operate and Council continues to try to identify additional burial space for Chard residents in the future. The Council is running out of burial plots and is working hard to address that situation. It agreed the purchase of two additional pieces of land near the cemetery and is currently carrying out ground water tests to ensure the land meets with the strict Environment Agency requirements.

The Town Council worked closely with SSDC regarding the development and implementation of the High Street Heritage Action Zone, which will see a significant investment being made in the centre of Chard commencing in September 2021. This includes the refurbishment of the Eastern Gateway and public realm works in Fore Street, Boden Street and Holyrood Street.

The Town Council increased its financial support towards the refurbishment of the Eastern Gateway to help enable SSDC to deliver this project.

The following projects have undertaken during the year:

- External cleaning of the Guildhall including a number of repairs to ensure the building continued to be in good repair;
- Play equipment provision was reviewed following the annual play area inspections. Quotations were sought and Council agreed to undertake investments at Jocelyn Park and Ashcroft Park. This work will commence in September 2021;
- Remedial repairs were undertaken at the Skate Park and Multi Use Games Area in Lower Henson Park;
- Street furniture was refurbished throughout the year and some new bins were also installed. Additional recycling bins are to be installed as part of the public realm works.

The Town Council applied for a number of grants during the year. The successful grant applications include:

- A bid to draw down funding for a Cultural Programme for Chard from Heritage England to be delivered through to March 2024 was successful. A sum of £80,000 was secured and the Culturally Chard programme has now commenced;
- The Town Council has been successful in drawing down three grants from the Somerset County Council Climate Change Fund. £18,000 was secured to help add solar panels to the Guildhall Auditorium roof, £25,000 was secured towards changing the Guildhall lighting over to LEDs and £19,000 was secured to carry out a waste audit with businesses in the town centre and develop a pilot recycling on the go initiative in the High Street.

- Five grants of varying amounts have been secured from the South Somerset District Council's Market Towns Investment Group (MTIG) to help improve signage in the town, invest in the public realm and recycling, renew the lamp columns outside the Guildhall and along Howards Row and to resurface Howards Row;
- £20,000 has been secured from the Welcome Back Fund to undertake initiatives to both help attract people back to Chard and to ensure that this is sustained;
- A SALIX energy saving fund grant towards an energy audit was secured. The audit addressed the needs of the Guildhall and the Cemetery Chapels.

The Town Council will continue to be ambitious on behalf of Chard



Financial Overview 2020/2021

Chard Town Council set a precept of £645,663 and a total budget of £799,746 to meet the costs of delivering Town Council services in Chard.

Although costs were down due to the Coronavirus restrictions income was also affected. Outlined below is a general breakdown of income and expenditure compared to budget during the financial year, which runs from 1st April to 31st March:

EXPENDITURE	ACTUAL	BUDGET	VARIANCE
Administration	£273,065	£245,480	-£27,585
Civic & Council	£5,518	£14,398	£8,880
Grants	£23,586	£26,955	£3,369
Guildhall	£96,654	£171,422	£74,768
Local Information Centre	£426	£600	£174
Loan Repayments	£53,120	£53,723	£603
Cemetery	£29,982	£34,406	£4,424
Street Cleaning	£83,268	£92,978	£9,710
Allotments	£4,061	£4,336	£275
Amenities	£100,733	£146,308	£45,575
Jocelyn Park	£845	£4,440	£3,595
Capital Expenditure	£21,450	£4,000	-£17,450
Markets	£5,856	£700	-£5,156
TOTAL	£698,564	£799,746	£101,182

INCOME	ACTUAL	BUDGET	VARIANCE
Administration	£650,540	£646,363	£4,177
Civic & Council	£0	£5,000	-£5,000
Grants	£5,000	£0	£5,000
Guildhall	£4,875	£39,200	-£34,325
Local Information Centre	£500	£500	£0
Cemetery	£21,203	£33,530	-£12,327
Street Cleaning	£58,192	£58,000	£192
Allotments	£4,504	£4,500	£4
Amenities	£1,724	£5,200	-£3,476
Jocelyn Park	£263	£5,445	-£5,182
Markets	£6,242	£2,000	£4,242
TOTAL	£753,043	£799,738	-£46,695

An underspend of £101,182 and a loss of income of £46,695 meant that at the end of the year the Town Council had underspent £54,487. This underspend was transferred into Council's balances and allocated mainly to play area refurbishments in 2021/22.



Organisation & Accountability

There are currently three tiers of local government, each with different responsibilities. Chard Town Council is the first and most local tier, with an important role to play in promoting the town, representing its interests and supporting the work of different groups in the community. South Somerset District Council is the second tier and is responsible for services including car parking, housing and street cleaning. Finally, Somerset County Council's responsibilities include highways (relating to both roads and pavements), education, health and social services, public rights of way and libraries.

Chard Town Council has fifteen elected Councillors who are elected every four years and represent one of six areas in the town, known as wards. The wards are Avishayes, Combe, Crimchard, Holyrood, Jocelyn and Shepherd's Lane.

The Town Mayor and Deputy Town Mayor are elected annually at the Annual Town Council Meeting in May. Due to the Coronavirus restrictions the Annual Town Council meeting was not held in 2020 and the existing appointments remained. Councillors are unpaid and commit their time to improving Chard and maintaining it as an attractive and sustainable place in which to live, visit and to do business. Elections were last held in May 2019 and are scheduled to be held next in May 2023. This may change subject to the introduction of the new single unitary authority for Somerset.

The full Council meets bi-monthly at The Guildhall. All meetings are open to the public, with a period of time set aside for members of the public to address Council. There are some occasions when for reasons of confidentiality members of the public and press are excluded. This is by means of a resolution in accordance with the requirements of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960.

In addition to the Full Council meetings there are four standing committees; Finance and Audit (F&A), Amenities and Events (A&E), HR & Personnel (HR&P) and Planning and Highways (P&H). P&H meet twice a month to act as consultees on planning applications and highways issues. F&A and A&E meet bi-monthly on the fourth Tuesday of the month and HR&P meet a minimum of twice a year. Again, all meetings are open to the public although it should be noted that HR&P meetings are held in confidence as they are dealing with employment matters.

1. The Finance & Audit Committee is responsible for monitoring the Council's finances on a quarterly basis. It prepares the annual budget and scrutinises income and expenditure. The Committee also reviews Council policies including Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, Insurance, Risk Management, Policies and Terms of Reference.

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2. Amenities & Events Committee oversees the management, maintenance and enhancement of all the land and buildings that are the responsibility of the Council. This includes the Guildhall, play areas and open spaces and the cemetery.
 3. Planning and Highways Committee make observations on all planning applications and planning issues, including Development Briefs, Local Plans, Structure Plans and Development Control and to make site visits where necessary. The committee works to ensure that planning matters are exercised in accordance with the legislative and policy requirements of the Council with due regard for the individuals and communities affected, the economic effects, sustainable and environmental impacts

In accordance with statute, at the end of each financial year the accounts of the Council are available for public inspection for a period of 30 working days. This period is advertised and facilities are made available for members of the public to come and examine the Council's accounts. As the Council is committed to a policy of openness and transparency any reasonable request to view the accounts, or any other aspect of Town Council work, will try and be accommodated at any time of the year. The External Audit last year was completed by PKF Littlejohn LLP and there were no matters of concern identified or reported.

The Council's website contains information regarding services and functions of the Council and there are many downloadable forms available relating to allotments and the cemetery. All of the minutes of the Council's meetings and its policies are available and can be downloaded in a PDF Format. If you do not have access to a computer and wish to see copies or extracts of minutes these can be made available for you to view at the Guildhall upon request in advance.



Your Council

How to get in touch

Your Town Councillors are elected democratically by the people of Chard. They are not paid and do not receive any allowances. It is the Councillors that make the decisions and steer the direction in which the Council goes.

Avishayes Ward	
Cllr Victoria Bates	Victoria.Bates@chard.gov.uk
Cllr Cath Morrison	Cath.Morrison@chard.gov.uk
Cllr Garry Shortland	Garry.Shortland@chard.gov.uk">Garry.Shortland@chard.gov.uk
Combe Ward	
Cllr Tricia O'Brien	Tricia.O'Brien@chard.gov.uk
Cllr Serena Wootton	Serena.Wootton@chard.gov.uk
Crimchard Ward	
Cllr Martin Carnell	Martin.Carnell@chard.gov.uk
Cllr Jenny Kenton	Jenny.Kenton@chard.gov.uk
Cllr Jenny Orchard	Jenny.Orchard@chard.gov.uk
Holyrood Ward	
Cllr Jason Baker	Jason.Baker@chard.gov.uk
Cllr Michelle Young	Michelle.Young@chard.gov.uk
Cllr Claire Brown	Claire.brown@chard.gov.uk
Jocelyn Ward	
Cllr Dave Bulmer	Dave.Bulmer@chard.gov.uk
Cllr Zak Williams	Zak.Williams@chard.gov.uk
Cllr Tim Eggins	Tim.eggins@chard.gov.uk
Shepherd's Lane Ward	
Cllr Andy Kenton	Andy.Kenton@chard.gov.uk

Contacting Officers

Visit us at:

Chard Town Council

The Guildhall

Fore Street

Chard

TA20 1PP

Tel: 01460 239567

Paul Russell, Town Clerk

email: townclerk@chard.gov.uk

Other Council officers may be contacted through

chardtowncouncil@chard.gov.uk or by phoning the Reception Desk on 01460 239567.

Other Legal Requirements

Chard Town Council is registered with the Information Commissioners Office to enable it to hold information under the Data Protection Act 1998, The Freedom of Information Act 2000 and has adopted the Model Code of Conduct for the conduct of its Councillors.

