

ANNUAL REPORT



2022/2023

Chard Town Council

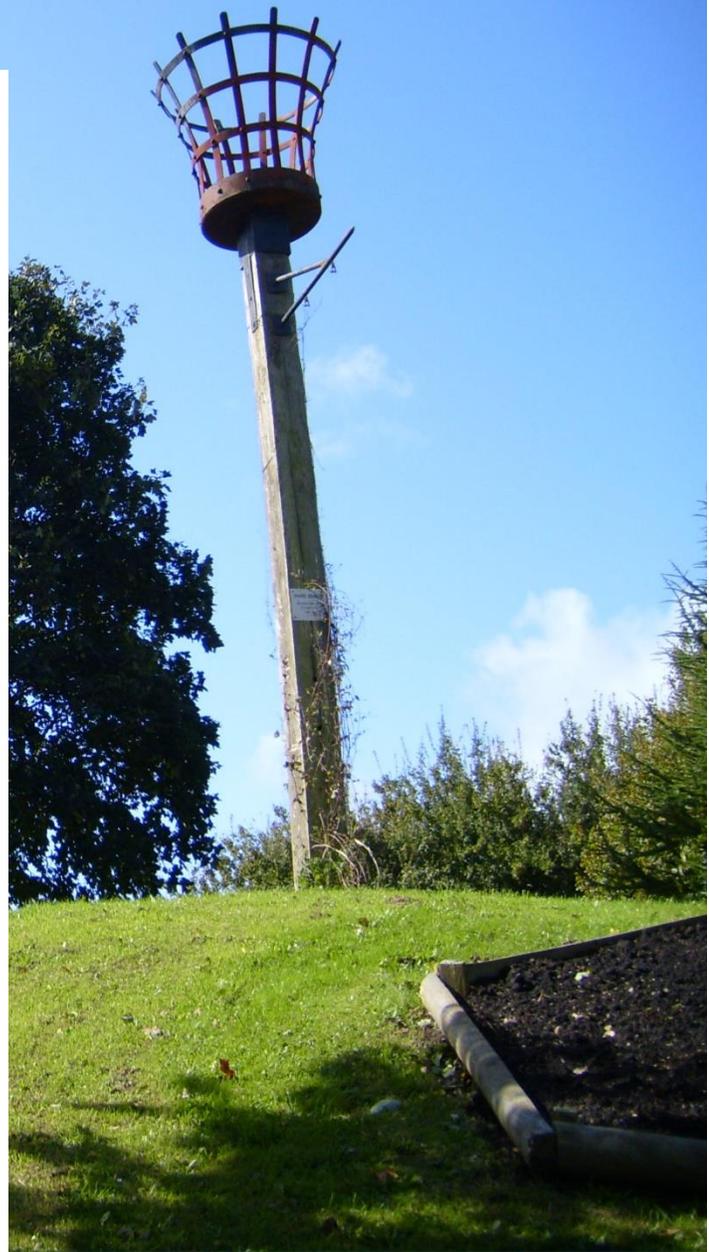


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CHARD TOWN COUNCIL

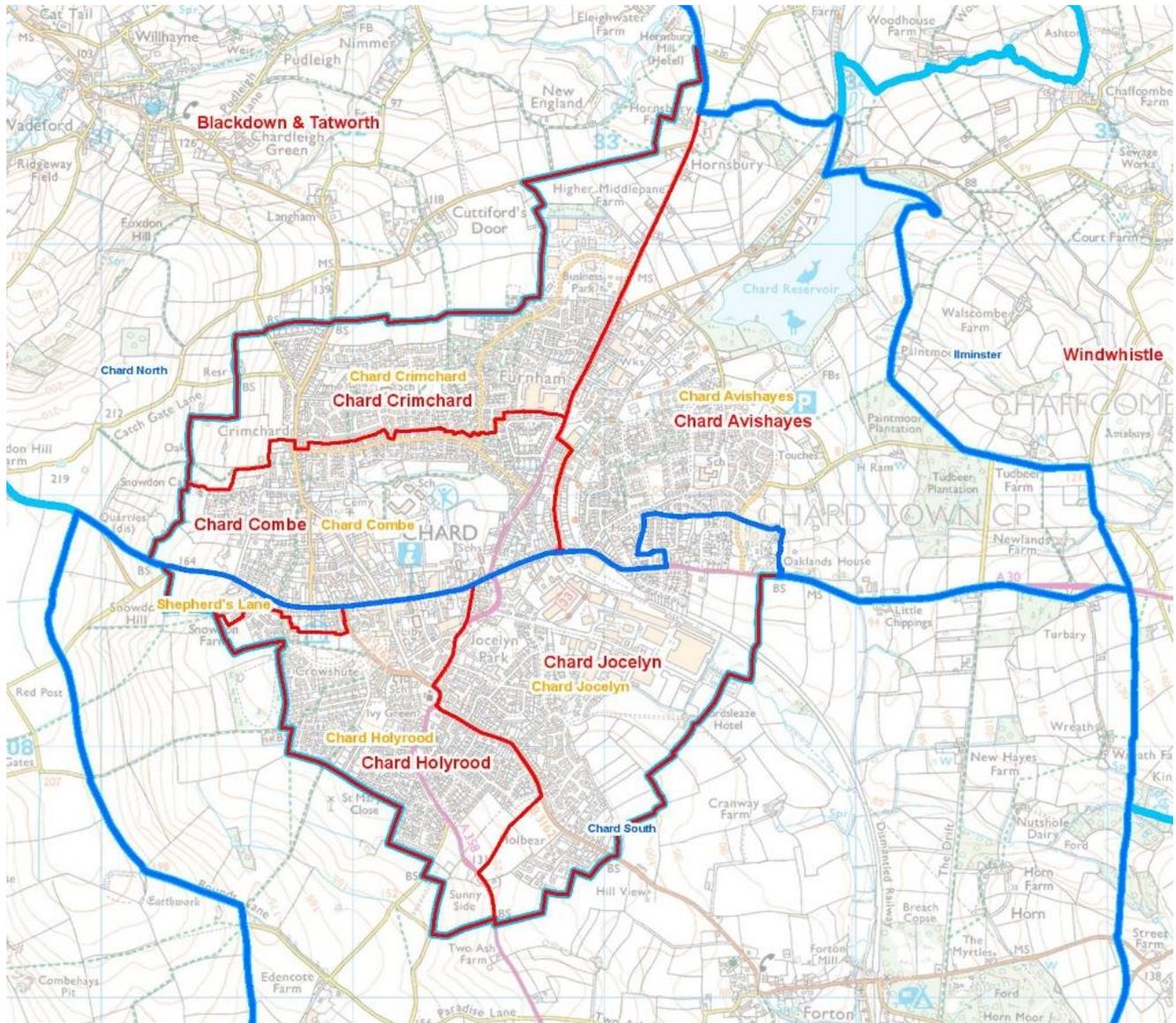
The Guildhall, Fore Street, Chard, Somerset TA20 1PP

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Mayor: Cllr Jenny Kenton

Ward Boundary Map

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





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THE MAYOR'S REPORT

Cllr Jenny Kenton

Although I currently sit at the head of Chard Town Council, this year has not been my Mayorship and it would be disrespectful not to pay tribute to the former Mayor Martin Carnell. Together we have raised money for his chosen charities; The Watch Project, Ferne Animal Sanctuary and Chard Area Youth Committee. These charities will receive their funds during the annual meeting, but also money was raised by the Councillors, friends and staff at the leisure centre with a sponsored swim. That money is being distributed through our Finance Officer to provide swimming lessons for children whose families might not be able to provide lessons for them.

Since January I have been "Emergency Mayor" and in that role I have started to re-visit contacts that had been forgotten during the Covid outbreak, as well as making new ones. Andy, Claire our Deputy Mayor, Officers and I have eaten cake with over 35 local people who are amongst those vital members of our community that provide voluntary support for our residents.

But this has also been my annus horribilis. Discord has caused a rift in the Town Council, and further afield, that needs time to heal. But I am sure we can heal those wounds.

We have so much to look forward to. We have an amazing team of staff as well as individually great Councillors, each one of them giving up their time for free to serve our community and each one of them with skills that when put together will deliver for Chard.

On May 9th we will welcome our new Town Clerk and the past will be the past and the future will begin.



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TOWN COUNCIL REPORT

Summary

The Officer Team at the Town Council wish to express their sincere thanks for the support and understanding shown by members of the Chard community, particularly during the last 6 months.

The last twelve months have seen substantial change and presented complex challenges for all those working for Chard Town Council. At the start of this period, the Officer Team were all relatively new in post and mostly new to Chard Town Council. The resignation of both the Town Clerk and Mayor toward the end of 2022 was significant to the team and has necessitated additional workload and responsibilities for Officers and staff alike.

The last year has also seen changes to the Councillor Team starting in May 2022 with Town Council elections. Six new councillors across the political parties were elected. In January 2023, a new Mayor was elected, followed by a co-option to select a new councillor for Crimchard ward in February 2023 and a by-election to vote a new councillor into Holyrood ward in March 2023.

In parallel with all the above changes:

- 12 significant pieces of work / projects have been completed,
- 7 events have been supported by or wholly organised and paid for Chard Town Council, notably the celebrations for Her Royal Highness Platinum Jubilee which took place over 3 days.
- 3 new projects have been started, an important one being the Community Plan which will be used to inform the Council's strategy 2023/24.
- The Culturally Chard Programme has also provided events, a major one being the annual Spring Festival, and established itself as a key contributor to the growth and development of Chard.
- The Youth Council has developed as a Council committee, providing demonstrable achievements with their chosen projects for Chard.

With the start of the new council year on May 9th comes the arrival of the new Town Clerk, who together with the well-established Officer and staff team with diverse skills and ability for team working, will create new beginnings and positive change. The Councillor Team will be putting into action recommendations raised in the commissioned Independent Investigation Report with a renewed and refreshed commitment to working collaboratively for the good of their community.

The whole Council team are looking forward to working on and completing those projects started in 2022/23, and developing a new 4-year strategy that is fit for purpose and considers the needs and views of the people of Chard.

Adrian Turner
Proper Officer



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1. PROJECTS, WORKS & EVENTS 2022/23

i) Projects & Works

In spite of the changing landscape Chard Town Council has successfully completed projects where funding was secured from a number of sources including South Somerset District Council's Community Development Fund, the Market Towns Investment Group (MTIG), Section 106 funding and Somerset County Council's Climate Change fund. These monies have supported the following:

- LED lighting installation through the town council estate,
- Replacement of street lighting columns in Howards Row/Fore Street
- Recycling bins in the Town Centre (*Recycling on the go* initiative)
- New air conditioning system installation in the Auditorium of the Guildhall to make the experience for our visitors, hirers and attendees of shows more enjoyable.
- Upgrades to CCTV
- Refurbishment of Stringfellow's Sculpture
- Purchase of Christmas lights.
- Acquisition of a Hamstone Gateway Welcome sign (yet to be erected)
- A new basket swing in Ashcroft Park
- Street furniture
- Two Comedy nights.

Further funding provided by the Tree Council has led to considerable tree planting that has created The Community Orchard, at the rear of the Museum

In addition, Chard Town Council have invested in the start-up of a dedicated Events Website. This has helped raise awareness of and increase usage of The Guildhall and will continue to do so. In the last 12 months the Guildhall has increased the events hiring from £16,527 to £30,775.

The planned major refurbishment to the Watts Store has also been completed using the Council's own resources. It is now a truly fit for purpose storage unit.

ii) Events

Through the last year there have been a number of major events that Chard Town Council have either supported, co-ordinated or organised (and sometimes all 3);

- April 2022 - 3-day Spring Festival
- May 2022 – 3-month consultation exercise for Upper Henson Park refurbishment.
- June 2022 - 3 day Her Royal Highness Platinum Jubilee celebrations
- September 2022 - Street Fayre
- September 2022 – Mourning Her Royal Highness Queen Elizabeth passing.
- October 2022 – The Carnival
- November 2022 – The switching on of Christmas lights



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2. PROJECTS, WORKS & EVENTS 2023/24

As well as delivering events and completing projects throughout 2022, work continued on existing projects and has started on new projects for 2023/24.

i) Repairs to the cemetery wall at St Mary's Churchyard, the cemetery extension and the new changing facility at Jocelyn Park were projects started in 2022/23 and will continue to be ongoing for 2023/24 for completion.

ii) 3 major new areas of work started are:

- **Completion of the Community Plan and development of identified key areas of work.**
The first phase, the on-line survey, is now complete and work will now start on phase two, collating all the survey data and setting out a draft Action Plan based on the findings from the survey. There will be two public engagement events 9th and 10th June 2023, where members of Chard Community can participate in defining the Action Plan. This will be presented to the Council and used to inform the next 4-year strategy.
- **Expansion of Chard Town Market**
Research has begun to identify need, neighbouring town market information and prospective new market stalls for Chard.
- **Completion of the Upper Henson Play park refurbishment.**
Wicksteed, the appointed contractor undertook an extensive consultation to inform the build of this park to include local schools, Youth Council, Girl Guides and Majorettes. They began works at the end February and completion is anticipated in May 2023.

iii) The creation of an agreed new 4-year strategy will be developed in 2023/24. This will help inform new projects and work streams beyond 2024

3. PROJECTS, PLANS & EVENTS FOR CONSIDERATION 2023/24 AND BEYOND

i) **Neighbourhood plan.** This is an area of work identified in the 2019 – 2023 council strategy and objectives with an original end date of initial works of 2025

What is neighbourhood planning?

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-planning--2#neighbourhood-plan-relating-to-Local-Plan>

Neighbourhood planning gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area. They are able to choose where they want new homes, shops and offices to be built, have their say on what those new buildings should look like and what infrastructure should be provided, and grant planning permission for the new buildings they want to see go ahead. Neighbourhood planning provides a powerful set of tools for local people to plan for the types of development to meet their community's needs and where the ambition of the neighbourhood is aligned with the strategic needs and priorities of the wider local area.



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What are the benefits to a community of developing a neighbourhood plan or Order?

Neighbourhood planning enables communities to play a much stronger role in shaping the areas in which they live and work and in supporting new development proposals. This is because unlike the parish, village or town plans that communities may have prepared, a neighbourhood plan forms part of the development plan and sits alongside the local plan prepared by the local planning authority. Decisions on planning applications will be made using both the local plan and the neighbourhood plan, and any other material considerations.

Neighbourhood planning provides the opportunity for communities to set out a positive vision for how they want their community to develop over the next 10, 15, 20 years in ways that meet identified local need and make sense for local people. They can put in place planning policies that will help deliver that vision or grant planning permission for the development they want to see.

ii) Opportunities arising from the changes to Local Government tiers in Somerset.

The recent changes in Somerset Local Government structure included the merger of all District Councils to one Unitary Authority, now called Somerset Council. This change will require a significant review of which services Town Councils in Somerset wish to provide.

At the beginning of the new Council year the Chard Councillor Team will need to consider the opportunities that exist. One example might be taking on the ownership and maintenance of all our local parks and open spaces. Currently Chard Town Council own and maintain six out of the 10 parks and open spaces in Chard.

4. CULTURALLY CHARD PROGRAMME

The Culturally Chard Consortium have successfully established themselves as a key contributor to the growth and development of Chard. This is evidenced in part by the month on month increase in footfall to the Town and also by the increased recognition of a new regular event for Chard Town - The Spring Festival, which is held over 3 days April. The first of these was held last year and a second is planned for April 2023. The events are packed with numerous diverse activities and events laid on for and created with the people of Chard and their neighbouring communities.

Highlights from 2022 Spring Festival were:

- The Banners of Chard, each telling their own unique story and currently displayed in the Auditorium and will go on loan for showcasing in various Somerset organisations - Lead consortium member Somerset Art Works (SAW);
 - *Lace Riot* and *Blue Plaque* walks undertaken - Lead consortium member Chard Museum
 - *Chardcasts* - Lead consortium member Chard Museum
 - *Water Histories project* - Lead consortium member Somerset Art Works (SAW);
 - First Comedy night for Chard (in some while) - Lead Consortium member Chard Town Council
- These are now becoming a regular standalone event due to the increased demand.



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5. RECRUITMENT AND STAFFING.

Recruitment of a new part time administrator has commenced and interviews are planned for early May. This post represents an addition to the administration team. Additional hours for caretaking provision were agreed in the last year and have been successfully recruited. Attempted recruitment to vacancies for the Amenities crew have been on-going for a significant amount of this year, proving difficult to fill but a recent promotional drive has yielded several applications. The new Town Clerk will start on 9th May.

6. RECEPTION, CARETAKING & AMENITIES.

Work has increased in all these 3 areas. The reception sees an average of 430 people per month making enquires, firmly establishing the key Local information Centre as a key service and support function for both the people of Chard and its visitors.

The increase in regular hirers and events has required a step-up approach from the caretaking team and they have proved their capability and willingness to achieve this, receiving many thanks and acknowledgements from Guildhall users.

The Amenities team have worked for the majority of the year under staffed for a variety of reasons. Despite this they have continued to maintain high standards in all their major areas of maintenance and upkeep.

7. GRANTS

The Town Council has awarded grants to the following organisations:

- Chard Area Youth Committee
- Chard Carnival
- Chard Town Team
- Chard Museum
- Chard Rugby Football Club
- Chard Cricket Club
- Nightingale
- The Hub South Chard
- Blackdown Acapella



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8. FINANCIAL OVERVIEW 2022/2023

The current financial year came to an end on 31st March 2023. The information below relates to all Council's financial transactions up to 28th February 2023. A final overview will be published on the Town Council's website once the Annual Accounts have been finalised and submitted to the external auditor for review.

Chard Town Council set a precept of £ 681,615 and a total budget of £767,583 to meet the costs of delivering Town Council services in Chard.

It has been another challenging financial year and there has been additional expenditure to meet the costs of various projects currently being delivered. The figures below give an indication of year to date from 1st April 2022 to 28th February 2023. The month of March 2023 has yet to be finalised.

EXPENDITURE	ACTUAL	BUDGET	VARIANCE
Administration	£320,246	£263,320	-£56,926
Civic & Council	£26,445	£17,450	-£8,995
Grants	£18,683	£19,400	£717
Guildhall	£229,451	£147,200	-£82,251
Local Information Centre	£421	£500	£79
Loan Repayments	£53,723	£53,723	£0
Cemetery	£39,010	£30,450	-£8,560
Street Cleaning	£12,130	£0	-£12,130
Allotments	£1,477	£2,750	£1,273
Amenities	£160,417	£216,320	£55,903
Capital Expenditure	£147,679	£15,720	-£131,959
Markets	£520	£750	£230
TOTAL	£1,010,202	£767,583	-£242,619

INCOME	ACTUAL	BUDGET	VARIANCE
Administration	£682,206	£682,215	-£9
Civic & Council	£9,769	£1,500	£8,269
Grants	£128,381	£0	£128,381
Guildhall	£41,497	£18,350	£23,147
Local Information Centre	£500	£500	£0
Cemetery	£30,859	£35,450	-£4,591
Allotments	£4,027	£4,450	-£423
Amenities	£7,785	£4,050	£3,735
Markets	£1,844	£2,800	-£956
TOTAL	£906,868	£749,315	£157,553



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The year to date over-spend of £242,619 has been mainly funded from Earmarked Reserves allocated by Full Council towards the projects. Details of the expenditure from Earmarked Reserves will be published following the end of year closedown.

The increase in income is due mainly to grants received. However, income generated from events and Guildhall hire has also shown a significant improvement which is forecast to continue.

9. ORGANISATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The three-tier structure of local government was replaced on 1st April 2023 by two tiers, with the responsibilities of Somerset County Council and South Somerset District Council being merged into the new unitary authority, Somerset Council. 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

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 elected Town Council will serve until May 2027.

The Town Mayor and Deputy Town Mayor are elected annually at the Annual Town Council Meeting in May. All Committee Chairs and other positions are also appointed at this meeting.

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 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 meets a minimum of twice a year. Again, all meetings are open to the public although it should be noted that HR meetings are held in confidence as they are dealing with employment matters.

The F&A 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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The A&E 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.

The P&H 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 to 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.



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10. HOW TO CONTACT YOUR COUNCIL: COUNCILLORS, OFFICER TEAM & STAFF

Your Town Councillors are elected 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. Your councillor can be contacted directly on the following e-mail addresses.

Avishayes Ward	
Cllr Victoria Bates	Victoria.Bates@chard.gov.uk
Cllr Banah Crook	Banah.Crook@chard.gov.uk
Cllr Andy Kenton	Andy.Kenton@chard.gov.uk
Combe Ward	
Cllr Jenny Kenton	Jenny.Kenton@chard.gov.uk
Cllr Jason Hawkes	Jason.Hawkes@chard.gov.uk
Crimchard Ward	
Cllr Zak Williams	Zak.Williams@chard.gov.uk
Cllr Andy Grief-Page	Andy.Grief-Page@chard.gov.uk
Cllr Claire Richter	Claire.Richter@chard.gov.uk
Holyrood Ward	
Cllr Jason Baker	Jason.Baker@chard.gov.uk
Cllr Garry Shortland	Garry.Shortland@chard.gov.uk
Cllr Shakil Hassan	Shakil.Hassan@chard.gov.uk
Jocelyn Ward	
Cllr Dave Bulmer	Dave.Bulmer@chard.gov.uk
Cllr Claire Brown	Claire.Brown@chard.gov.uk
Cllr Tim Eggins	Tim.Eggins@chard.gov.uk
Shepherd's Lane Ward	
Cllr Natasha Watson	Natasha.Watson@chard.gov.uk

Our offices are open Monday to Thursday 9am – 5pm and Fridays from 9am – 4.30pm.

You can contact us by post, telephone or by sending us an email:

Address: The Guildhall, Fore Street, Chard, Somerset TA20 1PP

Telephone: 01460 239567

Website: www.chard.gov.uk

Email: chardtouncouncil@chard.gov.uk

Other Legal Requirements

Chard Town Council is registered with the Information Commissioners Office to enable it to hold information under the Data Protection Act 2018, The Freedom of Information Act 2000 and has adopted the Model Code of Conduct for the conduct of its Councillors.



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