



CHIPPENHAM
TOWN COUNCIL

Improving the quality of town life



Chippenham Town Council - our Devolution Journey

Matt Kirby

Deputy Chief Executive



Background and History

- 1835 Local Government Act - Chippenham Borough Council formed
- All services within the Chippenham Town area, refuse, roads, markets, sanitary authority etc.
- 1889 Wiltshire County Council formed Quarter sessions, weights and measures, medical officer, surveyor, civil defense, roads
- 1835 - 1974 Chippenham Borough Council - in existence for 139 years
- 1974 - 1985 Charter Trustees - Returned a Town Mayor every year
- 1985 North Wiltshire District Council Statutory Instrument - created the parish of Chippenham and the formation of the Town Council

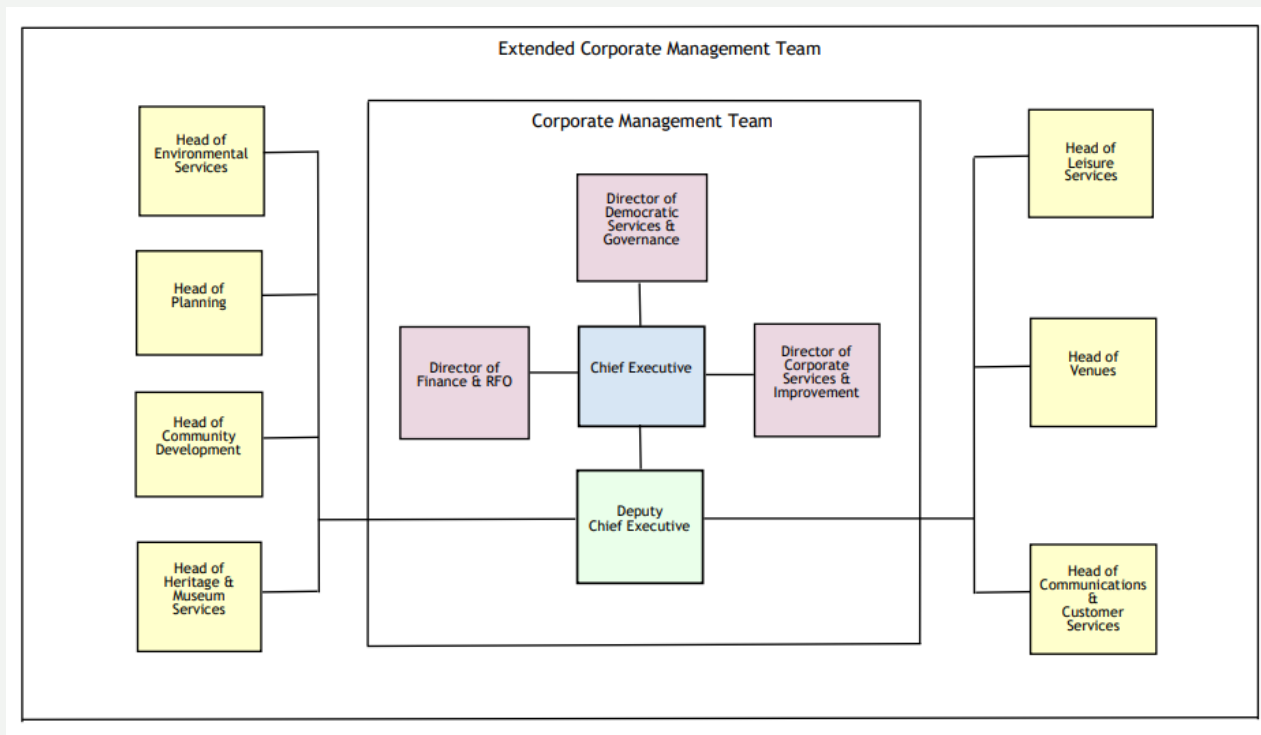
Background and History Continued

- 2009 Local Government reorganisation, four district councils in Wiltshire cease to exist. Wiltshire Unitary Council created
- 1835 - 2026 Borough Council/Charter Trustees/Town Council
- 2020 finalised the transfer of several major assets and services from Wiltshire Council
- 188 Mayors of Chippenham
- 11 Town Clerks





Staff Organisation Chart



Financial Overview

Budget 2025/26

Income

Precept	£4.4 m
Other Income	£0.7 m
Community Infrastructure Levy	£0.6 m

Expenditure

Staff	£3.0 m (60%)
Non-Payroll Costs	£2.1 m
Capital Expenditure	£0.6 m





Democratic Services

- 24 Councillors in 8 wards
- Standing Committees: Strategy & Resources, Amenities Culture & Leisure, Planning Environment & Transport, Human Resources
- Sub Committees: Civic Matters, Council Donations, Finance, Neighbourhood Plan Monitoring
- Steering Groups and Working Parties
- Youth Council
- Mayoral Calendar
- Civic Events



Deputy CEO Portfolio

- Environmental Services - Street Scene, Litter, Fly tipping, Grounds Maintenance, Parks and Outdoor Spaces, Play Areas, Allotments and Toilets
- London Road Cemetery
- Town Hall and Neeld
- Museum and Yelde Hall
- Stanley Park Sports Ground
- Chippenham Neighbourhood Plan
- CCTV, Markets, Tourism and Events
- Climate and Ecological Emergency Agenda



Our Achievements

- Purple Flag Town
- 2 Green Flags
- Britain in Bloom - Pride in Parks Award
- Quality Gold Council
- Visit England/Arts Council Accreditation for our Museum
- NALC - Climate Award National Finalist
- RTPI and Planning Awards - shortlisted for 'Plan Making' 2025.
- 2 LGA Corporate Peer Challenges Completed



Transfer of Assets and Services



Timeline Overview

2009 - Wiltshire Council formed. Simultaneously, Salisbury City Council was created, with a large scale transfer of assets and services. Area Boards created.

2016 - 2017 - A second transfer of assets and services to Salisbury City Council.

May 2017 - Chippenham Town Council commenced early talks with Wiltshire Council.

February 2018 - Formation of a Chippenham Town Council Devolution Working Party.

November 2018 - Wiltshire Cabinet agreed a new devolution policy.

December 2018 - Responsibility for negotiations delegated to the Chief Executive at the Strategy & Resources Committee.

June 2019 - A soft transfer of services from Wiltshire Council began.

June 2020 - The full transfer of assets and services - completed.



The Beginning

- There was a long held aspiration by Wiltshire Council to devolve services and assets.
- The formation of Salisbury City Council in 2009 was a mass transfer of services and assets.
- Various ad hoc transfers of land and property happened across the county up to 2017, under the guise of various policies.
- In 2017 there was a refreshed policy with a new transfer of services and assets to Salisbury City Council. Wiltshire Council learnt from this process.
- Wiltshire Council refreshed the cabinet policy in 2018, which generated massive interest, but lack of capacity to deliver.





The Beginning Ctd.

- A long list of interest was forming, with the Town Council nowhere near the top.
- Rather than passively wait for Wiltshire Council to come to us, we went to County Hall and commenced the conversation with their Leader and Corporate Directors.
- Chippenham Town Council established a Working Party in February 2018, and what we called our 'Basket of Opportunity'. We spent most of 2018 formulating our own internal clarity of what we wanted and were prepared to do.
- We also appointed a highly experienced consultant to help us on the devolution journey and bring best practice and external challenge to the process.

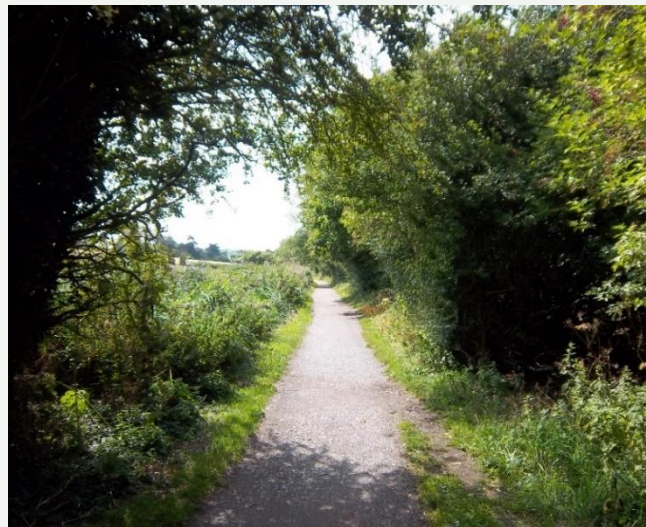
Negotiations

- The Town Council's willingness to be proactive and take the game to the principal council elevated us to the top of a long waiting list.
- Negotiations took longer than anticipated but in January 2019 we were able to take a report to our strategy and resources committee agreeing what would be included in the original transfer.
- Responsibility for agreeing the final negotiations and costings was delegated to CEO.
- We have always been clear about what we wanted, but willing to compromise.



Negotiations Ctd.

- Wiltshire Councils relationship with their existing contractor added an interesting dynamic to the negotiation.
- It was agreed that their work would continue, overseen by the Town Council from June 2019 to June 2020.
- We negotiated a contractual contribution to Wiltshire's costs between June 2019 and June 2020.
- We would provide a top up service to ensure high quality service standards throughout the town.
- From June 2020 the Town Council will assume sole responsibility for all 'clean and green' activity in the town.





Overview of assets transferred to the Town Council

Assets

- Gypsy Lane Multi-Use Games Area
- Audley Road Park
- Kingsley Road Park
- Barrow Green Park
- Blackwhellams Park
- Monkton Park
- Monkton Park Golf Course
- Yelde Hall
- Little England's Social Club
- Patterdown Allotments
- Neeld Community & Arts Centre
- Donkey Fields
- Sea Scouts Site/Building



Overview of assets transferred to the Town Council

Responsibilities across the Town

- Litter Picking
- Flyposting/Flytipping Removal
- Open/Closed Cemetery Maintenance
- All Trees on Amenity Land
- Grounds/Grass Maintenance
- Park/Highway Furniture
- Bus Shelter Maintenance
- Graffiti Removal
- Emptying Bins
- Weed Control
- Dead Animal Removal
- Leaf Clearance

Staffing & Budget

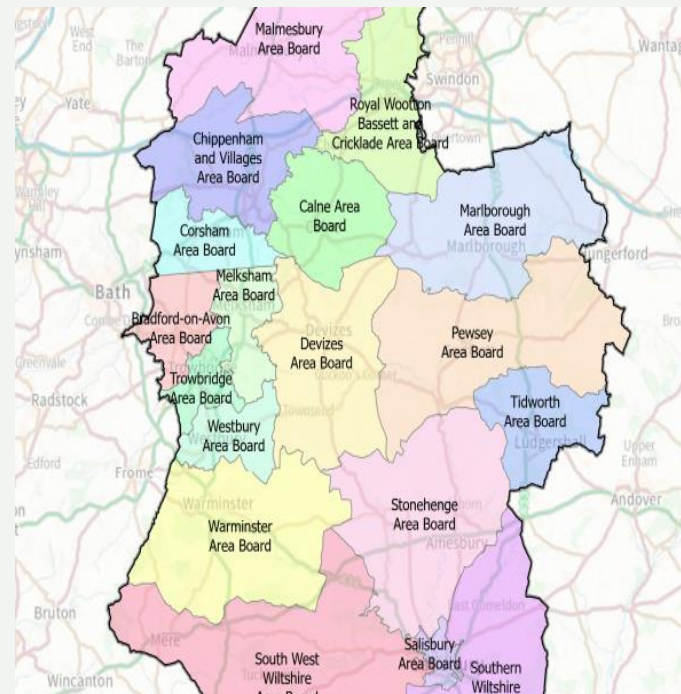
- In 2019 the Town Council employed an additional five staff and additional staff in 2020.
- We have purchased additional equipment including ride on mowers, pick up trucks and a 17 tonne road sweeper.
- Hired depot space initially but have now built a depot on our own land at Stanley Park c£180k.
- In order to pay for this we budgeted an additional £550,000 to go into our base budget for 2019/20.
- Council unanimously agreed to raise the precept by 37.5% for 2019/20 and by 9.8% in 2020/21.





Area Boards

- 18 Area Boards across Wiltshire, with each one holding delegated powers and devolved budgets to facilitate community action at a local level.
- Set priorities using CAJSNA
- Give Grants - Community/Youth/Projects
- LHFIG - highway and footway improvements subgroup.
- Community Asset Transfer



The Lessons We Learnt

- The process can take much longer than first anticipated.
- The Town Council and unitary Council have totally different perspectives on issues such as time scales, prioritisation and the level of Councillor involvement.
- The bigger the council the slower and more fragmented the decision making process can be.
- Processes such as this aren't an exact science and one has to occasionally take a leap of faith.



Devolution Top Tips

1. Take the game to the principal council, don't wait for them to come to you.
2. Involve and engage your Councillors at an early stage.
3. Be clear about what you want to achieve from the process.
4. Bring in some experienced external consultancy advice if required.
5. Be prepared to walk away from the negotiating table.
6. If you increase the precept, make sure you increase it by enough.

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CHIPPENHAM'S DEVOLUTION STORY...



Mark Smith FSLCC,
Chief Executive at
Chippenham Town
Council in Wiltshire, shares his
experience of the town council's
devolution (transfer of services and
assets) journey.



FACT FILE: CHIPPENHAM

Population	40,000
Councillors	24 in 8 wards
Staff	Over 70, with 70 Volunteers
Precept Budget	Just under £3M
Budget	£3.7M
Band D equivalent	£239.61

OVERVIEW OF THE DEVOLUTION PROCESS

On the 1st June 2019 the town council completed a major transfer of services and assets from Wiltshire Council. Rather than passively waiting for Wiltshire Council to come and talk to us, we went to County Hall and commenced the conversation with their Leader and Corporate Directors. We established a Working Party in February 2018, and established what we called our 'Basket of Opportunity'. Alongside this we appointed a highly experienced consultant to help us on the devolution journey, to bring some best practice and external challenge to the process.

Our willingness to organise ourselves and essentially take the game to the principal council elevated us to the top of a long waiting list of councils. Negotiations have taken longer than we anticipated but we were able to take a report to our Strategy and Resources Committee in January 2019 that agreed what would be included in the Chippenham transfer, with responsibility for agreeing the final negotiations and costs being delegated to myself.

Wiltshire Council's contractual relationship with their estate 'streetscene' contractor added an interesting dynamic to the negotiation but we settled on a solution whereby the town council would make a contribution to contractual costs and play a role in overseeing the contract until June 2020. In addition, it was agreed that the town council would provide a top up service until then to ensure that the service standards throughout the town are of a high quality. As from June 2020 the town council shall then assume sole responsibility for all 'clean and green' activity in the town.

In terms of the actual transfer the town council has taken on the responsibility for grass cutting, grounds maintenance, street sweeping and

litter clearance on a town wide basis as from June this year. We have employed an additional five staff as from this year and plan to employ more staff next year, we have purchased additional plant and equipment including: ride on mowers, pick-up trucks and a Thorne road sweeper. We are currently hiring additional depot space but in the fullness of time we have an aspiration to build a purpose built depot on our own land.

We received the freehold transfer of Monkton Park (an historic town centre park) and golf centre, the 15th century Yelde Hall (former Guildhall prior to 1835) the Need Community & Arts Centre, six play areas and various other properties and land around the town. We also took on responsibility for the Friday and Saturday charter markets in the town.

In order to pay for all of this, we have budgeted an additional £550,000 to go into our base budget this year. Council unanimously agreed to increase the precept by 37.5% next year, we are a political council and the decision was unanimous across the two main groups and the independent councillors.

Throughout the negotiation process the working relationship between the two councils was excellent, if anything it has strengthened our relationship and understanding of each other's pressures and priorities at a political and an officer level.

There is however a certain irony to the process, given that all of the assets that are transferring to the town council were in the ownership of the former Chippenham Borough Council from 1839 through to 1974, there's certainly a sense of 'they are back where they belong' within the council and the town!

THE LESSONS WE LEARNT?

- The process can take much longer than first anticipated.
- The Town Council and the unitary council have totally different perspectives on issues such as time scales, prioritisation and the level of councillor involvement.
- The bigger the council the slower and more fragmented the decision making process can be.
- Processes such as this aren't an exact science and one has to occasionally take a leap of faith.



MARK'S TOP DEVOLUTION TIPS

1. Take the game to the principal council, don't wait for them to come to you
2. Involve and engage your councillors at an early stage
3. Be clear about what you want to achieve from the process
4. Bring in some experienced external consultancy advice if required
5. Be prepared to walk away from the negotiating table



Final Thoughts

1. Chippenham has benefitted from a bold strategy and desire to improve the Town - the Town Council has taken local ownership of place and local service delivery.
2. Wilshire Council simply couldn't afford to deliver these services. Their focus is on strategic areas such as adult care services, children's services, planning, highways, and other county-wide responsibilities.
3. Is it Double Taxation?
4. The critical mass - how can smaller rural parishes protect and deliver services?



Questions?