

Our Strategic Plan 2024-2029



Uckfield Town Council

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Uckfield Town Council

Our five-year strategic plan sets out the direction for Uckfield Town Council between 2024 and 2029. It helps us to understand where we are today, where we want to be in the future and the steps we will take to get there.

The plan sets out a number of objectives that we wish to achieve within this period. It takes on board the current situation within which we are working, in particular the challenges and opportunities for Uckfield. It also reflects on the feedback we have from both our residents and partners about what matters to them.

The financial situation for local councils remains challenging. Like many homes and businesses, we have been affected by the increasing utility costs, rising material costs and stock costs associated with the cost of living crisis. The Town Council is committed to doing the very best for the town, its residents, local businesses and visitors in this situation. We will work in partnership with the right agencies and community groups to do this, ensuring that Uckfield remains a beautiful place to live.



Uckfield Town Mayor, Cllr Jackie Love

Our Councillors

				
Cllr Karen Bedwell (Ridgewood Ward)	Cllr Duncan Bennett (New Town Ward)	Cllr Ben Cox (New Town Ward)	Cllr Donna French (Deputy Mayor) (East Ward)	Cllr Val Frost (West Ward)
				
Cllr Jackie Love (Town Mayor) (North Ward)	Cllr Chris Macve (East Ward)	Cllr Daniel Manvell (North Ward)	Cllr Michael McClafferty (East Ward)	Cllr Spike Mayhew (New Town Ward)
				
Cllr Bernadette Reed (Ridgewood Ward)	Cllr Peter Selby (Ridgewood Ward)	Cllr Angie Smith (North Ward)	Cllr Peter Ullmann (New Town Ward)	Cllr Diane Ward (West Ward)

Facts and figures

Uckfield is one of five market towns in the Wealden District, and the third most populous. Our facilities serve residents of the town as well as those of neighbouring villages.

The town's semi-rural setting attracts new residents and visitors, with close access to the Ashdown Forest being a big draw while the beautiful green spaces and woodlands located within the town provide plenty of opportunities for leisure and recreation.

In order to better understand our town, we keep track of local statistics. With more data becoming available from the 2021 census all the time, these updates are helping to provide an up-to-date profile of our population. Some key examples are below.

15,041 residents

(2021 census, Office for National Statistics)



Living in 6,456 households

(2021 census, ONS)



More women live here than men

(Women 52.2% of town population while men 47.8% - compared to the national average of 51% and 49%)

(2021 census, ONS)



2,474 residents are disabled under the Equalities Act

(16.4% of town population)

(2021 census, ONS)



Good level of education

(83.9% of adult population have qualifications, 2.1% above than the UK average)

(2021 census, ONS)



63% of adults are economically active

(7,785 of 12,354 adults in the town)

(2021 census, ONS)



High rate of house ownership

(73.8% of houses are owned or in shared ownership, above the UK average of 62.5%)

(2021 census, ONS)



Most households have at least one vehicle

(86.9% of households own one or more car/van)

(2021 census, ONS)



83.8% of the population have 'good' or 'very good' health

(Selected from options of 'very good'; 'good'; 'fair'; 'bad'; and 'very bad')

(2021 census, ONS)



Average rate of working from home

(2,292 - or 15.2% - of 7,519 economically active adults work most days from home, compared to 16% nationally)

(2021 census, ONS for local figures and 2023 Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, ONS for national figures)

Turning challenges into opportunities

Challenges

Opportunities

Limited infrastructure to support future development

With an increase in the population and plans for further development in the town, it is important for key agencies to consider where improvements are required in terms of infrastructure – education, health, transport, car park provision, sewerage capacity, water supply, broadband coverage and mitigation of flood risk.



Proposals for growth

Applications have been submitted for a number of developments on the periphery of Uckfield. These are being made without an adopted Wealden Local Plan and infrastructure, but will increase options for housing with hopes of an increased affordable housing stock which will support first-time buyers and young families, and offer developer contributions to infrastructure

Financial crisis

The council, like many businesses, has been affected by increasing utility, fuel, material and supply costs in recent years.



Range of facilities

Uckfield has a substantial range of facilities which help to grow the local economy. With an independent cinema, leisure centre, high-performing schools, a diverse selection of shops and free parking, the town centre has many big draws for residents and visitors.

Retaining our highly educated workforce

Uckfield has high levels of educational attainment, but strong transport links to Brighton, London and East Croydon mean much of the town's working age population are attracted to work out of the town.



Central location within South East

Uckfield can appeal to the entire South East population as it is at the heart of the Wealden District, between London and the south coast. The town's proximity to Gatwick Airport and Newhaven Ferry Port also provides job opportunities and ease of travel.

Flood risk

The River Uck runs through the middle of the town and high rains consistently place the town at risk of fluvial flooding. Mitigating measures are in place, but the town is susceptible to surface water run-off in heavy bouts of rain as a result of the undulating landscape.



Our green spaces

Uckfield is fortunate to have two nature reserves, several green spaces and five allotment sites. We can increase the awareness of environmental issues amongst town residents by encouraging greater use of these spaces and by continuing to maintain them to a high standard.

Addressing traffic congestion

The road network through Uckfield and the surrounding A22 bypass are heavily used by traffic. Although works in the High Street have improved accessibility for pedestrians and vehicles, there are still a number of pinch points on the corridors to the town which could benefit from improvements and works being undertaken to address capacity.



Improvements to transport links

The train station platform has been extended, carriages increased and a new station car park created in recent years, which supports an increase in rail users. The bus station area is also being upgraded. The Council would support any future opportunities to electrify the rail line, and longer term plans to re-establish a rail line between Lewes and Uckfield and build a new rail link between Uckfield and Brighton via Falmer.

Limited financial resources

The Town Council, along with other tiers of local government (District and County Councils), are being placed under increasing financial pressure. Despite this, the Council still needs to deliver the services for which it has responsibility and consider taking on services devolved from other tiers of local government under financial restraint. This may require the Town Council to be innovative and/or make difficult decisions.



Partnership working

As with all local authorities, the Town Council is in a strong position to work closely with its partner agencies to retain good quality services for residents. Partnership working can provide good value for money and increase opportunities.

Asset management

The Town Council has responsibility for a number of assets that could assist in generating higher revenues in the future. The Town Council will routinely monitor its Asset Management Plan and consider opportunities for the future.

Our Vision, Mission and Priorities

Our Vision

Preserving heritage, providing for the future.

Our Mission

Working with our partner agencies to provide a high standard of services for residents, businesses and visitors to the town.

Our Council's Priorities

Community

- Culture and community
- Civic Centre and Luxfords Restaurant

Conservation

- Environment and wellbeing
- Preparing for growth and infrastructure
- Accessibility and community safety

Continuous Improvement

- Reviewing our processes and procedures

Our Strategic Priorities - Community

In addition to agreeing a set of specific priorities each year, the Town Council has set out a number of medium-term aspirations for the town. This begins with our Community priorities.

Cultural activities and support in the community

By 2029 we will have:

- Supported local community and voluntary organisations and sought to assist them with their positive work within the town, whilst encouraging residents to volunteer;
- Worked alongside the local business community and community groups to deliver two free public events within the town in 2024 - D-Day Anniversary Beacon lighting and Weald on the Field;



- Established a list of special and important dates or individuals within the town's history and commemorated these on heritage plaques;
- Investigated the viability of providing additional public convenience facilities within the town centre and seeking to obtain a changing spaces facility through applications for associated grant funding;
- Supported the town with the promotion of its tourism offer, through liaison with the Uckfield & District Preservation Society and Wealden District Council's Economic Development team;
- Continued to maintain, improve and protect all of our natural areas to accommodate the demands of future growth of the town;

- Explored whether there are opportunities for adding to or improving the existing skatepark facilities, and the drainage in the vicinity of the skate park;
- Explored the creation of an outside performance space on Town Council-owned land, for use by the town as part of the annual events calendar;
- Supported the partnership work and continuation of Uckfield Youth Club;
- Explored issues around food poverty, particularly youth food poverty in Uckfield, and worked with the relevant authorities and local organisations to try and tackle these issues locally;
- Worked with partner agencies to identify future options for providing more community space within the town, meeting the needs of local community groups and organisations;
- Worked with partner agencies to understand more about our disadvantaged communities and explored ways to engage with these households;
- Lobbied for a banking presence, either by retaining existing banking services or supporting the creation of a banking hub to provide a face-to-face facility for local residents.



Our Strategic Priorities - Community

Extending our Community priorities, Uckfield Town Council recognises that the sites we own - the Civic Centre and Luxfords Restaurant - must grow and develop too.

Civic Centre and Luxfords Restaurant

By 2029 we will have:

- Made improvements to the decoration and flooring within the main corridors and meeting rooms;
- Undertaken improvements to the venue's performance facilities (sound, lighting and staging);
- Replaced the tables and table racks within the Civic Centre to ensure easier manoeuvrability for room set-ups;
- Updated room facilities in line with the latest technologies, providing the facilities to enable hybrid meetings to be hosted within the Weald Hall and Council Chamber;



- Introduced temporary air conditioning units within the Civic Centre building for the summer months;
- Reconfigured the caretaker area within the Civic Centre to provide more secure storage and office capacity;
- Implemented the introduction of an online booking facility on the Civic Centre website for the purchase of event tickets;
- Developed and implemented a communications and marketing plan for the Civic Centre, in addition to an annual calendar of events;

- Introduced a number of initiatives and increased takeaway options for customers in Luxfords Restaurant;
- Built a good online and social media presence for both the Civic Centre and Luxfords Restaurant;
- Installed further solar panels on the roof of the Civic Centre in line with the Town Council's Climate Change Action Plan.



Our Strategic Priorities - Conservation

Our medium-term aspirations for the town feature a strong focus on Conservation, which we recognise is an increasingly important issue to our area.

Environmental and regulatory services

By 2029 we will have:

- Maintained a good standard of grounds maintenance to ensure Uckfield remains an attractive place to live;
- Maintained good quality floral displays within the town centre to ensure Uckfield's town centre remains an attractive place to live, work and visit;
- Financially contributed to East Sussex County Council's grass verge cutting contract in 2024/25, retaining a good standard of service and ensuring visibility is maintained on pavements and highways;
- Purchased suitable equipment and continued to improve arrangements for managing the cutting of grass on the Town Council's open spaces in-house;
- Made arrangements to lease suitable vehicles for the Grounds Maintenance staff, and explored the purchase of alternative vehicles for woodland and nature reserve work;
- Improved the facilities and surfacing at the Town Council's play areas, and upgraded at least one further playground (Victoria Pleasure Ground in 2024/25 and improvements to Oakwood Drive Play Area, and Hempstead Recreation Ground before consideration of West Park);



- Put together short, medium and long-term plans to improve the Town Council's sport pitches (cricket and football);
- Designated areas of Town Council land for the growth of wildflowers;
- Introduced initiatives to increase the use of our open spaces and encourage greater physical

- activity (distance markers, games and activities which encourage movement, etc.);
- Worked with partner agencies to increase opportunities for residents of all ages to take part in activities which improve their health and wellbeing;
- Liaised with landowners adjacent to the River Uck to investigate the purchase of land from the end of the footpath in Knights Meadow to Hempstead Lane by the mill to allow the existing footpath to be extended to the mill, rugby field and Buxted Park and create the first section of a River Walk;



- Continued working with Sussex Local Nature Partnership as part of their Green Spaces Project to understand the ecological benefits of green spaces, as well as the social, health and wellbeing benefits, in order to develop a longer-term vision and set of objectives for these sites – particular focus will have been given to Hempstead Meadows Local Nature Reserve and Snatts Road Cemetery;
- Adopted an action plan for delivery of our carbon audit, in order to reduce our carbon emissions, and ensured a periodic review of the audit is undertaken;
- Introduced changes and new initiatives in line with the Town Council's Climate Change Policy and action plan to reduce the Town Council's carbon emissions through reviews of our contracts, buildings, energy sources and management of nature and waste disposal;

Our Strategic Priorities - Conservation

Further environmental and regulatory services priorities are listed here, including our targets for the Snatts Road Cemetery site.

Environmental and regulatory services - continued

By 2029 we will have:

- Implemented the Town Council's Woodland Management Plan to ensure the ongoing delivery of maintenance works, and ensured the safety of nearby residential properties and woodland users from ash dieback;
- Continued the 'Tree for a Tree' replanting scheme, in which every tree that has been removed in maintenance works is replaced by a new sapling, and identified suitable sites where additional trees can be planted on Town Council land;
- Delivered a project with Brighter Uckfield and Uckfield Chamber of Commerce to encourage Uckfield's businesses and organisations to reduce their use of single-use plastic, and undertaken a review around recycling and reusing suitable materials;
- Continued to provide burial authority services with responsibility for the maintenance of the Snatts Road Cemetery and Holy Cross churchyard;
- Considered and introduced proposals (if required) to expand cemetery provision at Snatts Road Cemetery, with an investigation into the provision of a natural memorial area;
- Lobbied developers and explored options on existing land to increase allotment site provision in line with demand over the next five years;
- Placed greater focus on wildlife monitoring in both our ancient woodlands and local nature reserves, and separated areas from the public to preserve the flora and fauna and protect key species;
- Implemented key steps to improve the biodiversity of Harlands Pond;
- Worked with the relevant agencies to restore Uckfield's watercourses and make improvements to their biodiversity.



Our Strategic Priorities - Conservation

Conservation issues that we are focusing on also include planning and development services, where we work with several partners and authorities to protect and develop local sites.

Planning and development services

By 2029 we will have:

- Worked closely with the planning authority, Wealden District Council, to understand the latest legislative updates and guidance;
- Fed into Wealden District Council's Local Plan development process, responding to consultations and raising issues relating to Uckfield;
- Supported the development of a Neighbourhood Plan and worked with Action in Rural Sussex and the Local Planning Authority to enable this plan to be adopted and utilised alongside the Wealden Local Plan by developers;
- As a member of Uckfield Town Centre Regeneration Committee, worked with our partners (Wealden District Council and East Sussex County Council) to explore options for regeneration within the town centre and the possibility of expanding the retail and business offer, including exploring options which benefit the community on the former Holy Cross Primary School site;
- Promoted the need for affordable and key worker housing within Uckfield (to purchase and rent), to support those in need of housing and first-time buyers;
- Considered the infrastructure requirements for the town in terms of sport, leisure, recreation and community facilities through engagement with key stakeholders, local residents and businesses, including considering future demand on Town Council services such as allotment and cemetery provision;



- Worked with local education establishments to understand their requirements for the future to support a growing population;

- Held developers to account to ensure the conditions of planning permissions are met, and adjacent boundaries and wildlife are sensitively looked after;
- Worked with Wealden District Council to ensure the Town Council is fully engaged in other regulatory matters, such as licensing;
- Developed an annual process by which the Town Council reviews its assets and strategic asset management plan, and which considers each of the Town Council's buildings to improve the efficiency and use of these properties;
- Delivered a ten-year programme of maintenance and decoration to all of the Town Council community buildings through schemes of major and minor works;
- Reviewed the condition of car parks adjacent to Town Council owned buildings and agreed a programme of repairs or resurfacing, with a particular focus given to drainage and repair at Hempstead Recreation Ground and Ridgewood Village Hall car parks;



- Worked with the Chamber of Commerce to engage with High Street landlords (commercial and residential) to promote and secure improvements to street frontages, and consider the encouragement of pop-up shops in vacant premises;
- Protected the green space between Uckfield town and surrounding villages;
- Worked towards the '30 by 30' United Nations target to designate 30 per cent of land and ocean areas as protected areas by 2030 to aid nature recovery.

Our Strategic Priorities - Conservation

Our Conservation targets also include a focus on our local transport links, recognising the importance of moving around our town and local area.

Highways and transport services

By 2029 we will have:

- Identified potential areas within the town which required improvements to pedestrian safety, and worked with the relevant agencies to lobby for enhancements, including investigating the possibility of repairing the footpaths on Manor Park to remove the risk of trips and falls;
- Worked with our partner agencies to feed into improvements to the bus station area to improve accessibility, signage and facilities such as real time bus information and public convenience(s);
- Lobbied for improved bus services which support the community, enabling residents on the periphery of the town to access the High Street and business park, and for residents in local villages to access Uckfield as their key service centre;
- Worked with our partner agencies to identify highway issues within the access corridors to the town centre and utilised Section 106 (of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990) developer contributions or the Community Infrastructure Levy to improve infrastructure and address matters relating to traffic congestion, traffic calming and road safety;
- Worked with the relevant partner agencies to address the danger of speeding vehicles and the possibility of extending the 20mph town centre speed limit;



- Introduced speed reduction initiatives including community speedwatch and behaviour change campaigns, and explored the introduction of

- mobile/permanent speed indicator devices;
- Worked with partner agencies to identify and implement solutions for introducing parking controls within the town centre;
- Remained engaged in discussions to actively promote the electrification of the railway line, and the potential reopening of a line between Uckfield to Lewes providing a direct route into Brighton;
- Worked with partner agencies to explore whether electric car charging points can be introduced in Uckfield;
- Organised an annual day with partner agencies to educate young people about topical issues such as climate change;



- Worked with partner agencies and landowners to explore the possibility of improving footway links between Ridgewood Farm, the Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs) and the nature reserves, and explored the possibility of creating a riverside walk;
- Created up-to-date street maps of the town, which highlight our open spaces and footways including the alleyways and twittens;
- Continued to work with East Sussex County Council to gradually review street lighting and replace older lights with new columns and LED lighting where necessary;
- Worked with Uckfield Chamber of Commerce and local businesses to review festive lighting for the town centre in preparation for Christmas 2024 and beyond.

Our Strategic Priorities - Continuous Improvement

Finally, our strategic priorities also include Continuous Improvement. These targets require us to think about how we can improve our processes and procedures as a Town Council.

Processes and procedures

By 2029 we will have:

- Improved communication with residents, businesses and visitors to the town through enhancements to the Town Council website and social media accounts;
- Improved the condition and display of existing noticeboards, and undertaken a review of their location to ensure they are clear and visible;
- Improved accessibility to committee meetings by installing an additional hearing loop in the Council Chamber;
- Increased promotion of the town's key facilities;
- Encouraged applications from local traders and organisations in the Town Council's procurement procedures for contractual work within the town;



- Provided training and briefings for the Town Councillors and staff to support them in their learning and development;
- Undertaken a thorough review of our key policies, in particular our personnel and GDPR-based policies to ensure they remain up-to-date with the latest guidance and best practice;
- Reduced our use of paper in the Town Council office by reviewing our working practices and procedures in file retention, purchase orders, invoicing, and record management;
- Commissioned an organisational review to ensure we are resilient and prepared for growth within the town;

- Further reviewed our existing financial processes - including digitalising our purchase order and invoicing;
- Placed more focus on searching and applying for suitable grant funding to fund key projects for the benefits of local residents;
- Set up councillor surgeries to enable residents to have more frequent face-to-face contact with their elected members.



Delivering our Objectives

Overview of the Town Council

The Town Council has 15 Town Councillors, who are elected every four years. The last set of Town Council elections took place in May 2023. The next set of local elections will therefore take place in May 2027.

The positions of Town Mayor and Deputy Town Mayor are elected by the Town Councillors each year at the start of the annual statutory meeting of Full Council, which takes place in May.

All Town Councillors meet in the format of Full Council at least six times a year, and the Town Council's three main standing committees are:

- General Purposes Committee (9 members)
- Environment and Leisure Committee (9 members)
- Plans Committee (7 members)

We also have two sub-committees responsible for dealing with specific matters related to

finance and human resources, called Personnel Sub-Committee and Finance Sub-Committee, which report their recommendations back to General Purposes Committee. These sub-committees meet on an ad-hoc basis when further detailed work is required.

Normally, formal committee meetings are held in the Council Chamber or Weald Hall of the Civic Centre Uckfield. Residents are welcome to attend these public meetings and make statements in relation to items on the agenda of that committee, subject to the Chairman's discretion.

Under the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014, members of the public are able to film and record during a committee meeting to report on the meeting.

Financial information

General finances

Town Councillors are required to start the process of budget setting within the autumn for the following financial year.

This provides time to review our income and expenditure, the priorities of the Town Council, the priorities within the Town and the costs associated.

The precept is the local tax levied by the Town Council and collected on our behalf by Wealden District Council as the rating authority.

The precept for 2023/24 was agreed by the Town Council on 23 January 2023 at a figure of £1,051,151.

Capital expenditure

The Council adopts a balanced approach to its capital expenditure in respect of the procurement of new assets and the

maintenance of its existing assets.

The first priority should however focus on developing and maintaining existing assets for the benefit of the community. Additional income may also be generated, where appropriate, through renting or leasing of these assets.

Reserves

The Council adopts a risk-based approach to its level of reserves which is reviewed annually or more frequently if necessary.

Currently, the minimum level of general reserves will be set at approximately three months' gross operating costs. Reserves will only be held above the minimum level for specific, earmarked purposes.

Delivering our objectives

Organisational structure

Delivery of the Town Council’s functions is overseen and managed by the Town Clerk, who is the Town Council’s proper officer and required to support and advise members in their role and issue any statutory notifications.

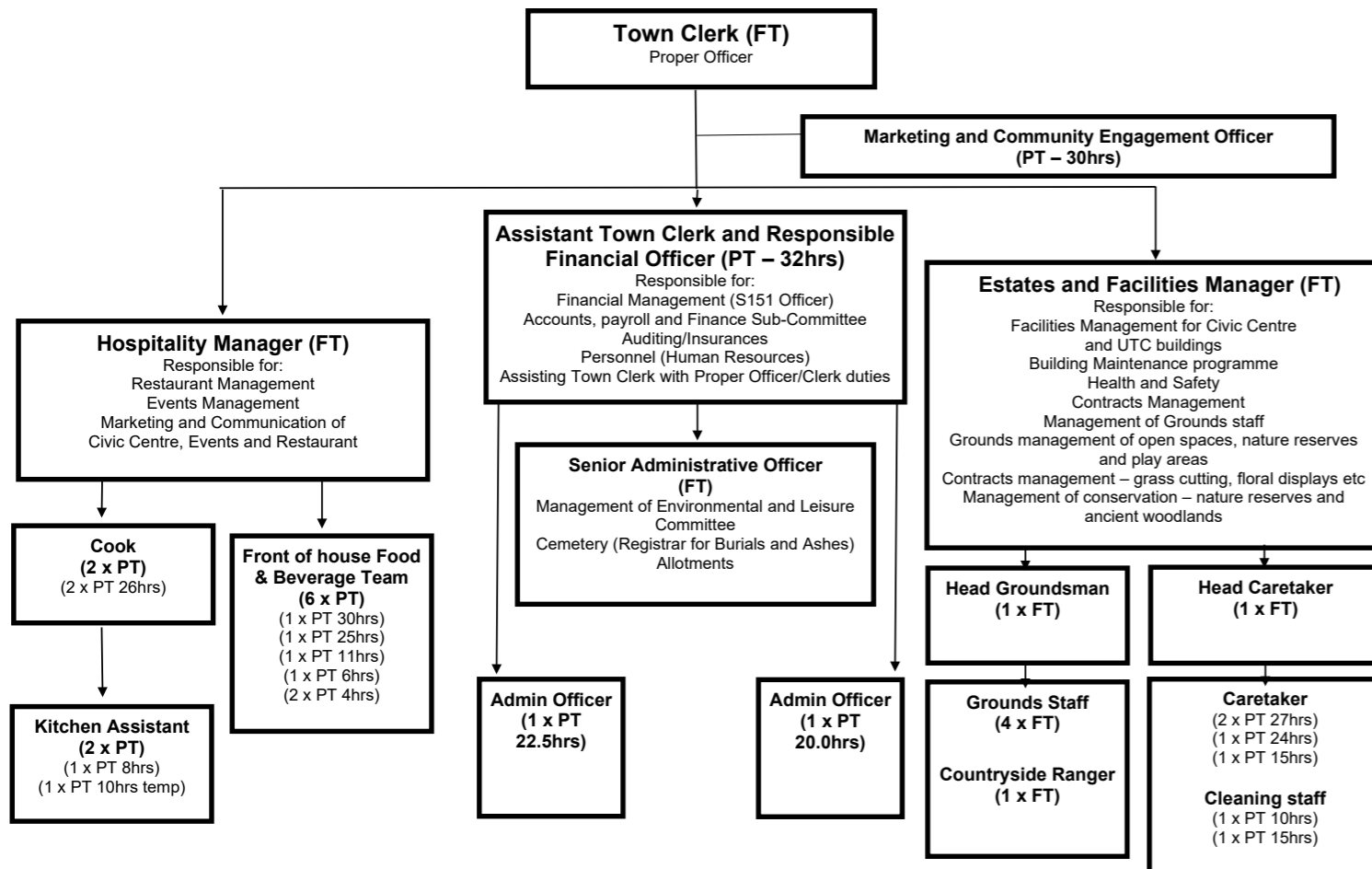
The Town Clerk is supported by a team of 30 members of staff who are responsible for maintaining the town’s grounds and open spaces, buildings, facilities, and providing services to our customers within Luxfords Restaurant and the Civic Centre.

The Assistant Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer is responsible for managing the Council’s finances, human resources and Council administration.

The Hospitality Manager is responsible for managing the restaurant, Civic Centre room hire and hospitality, and Civic Centre events programme.

The Estates and Facilities Manager is responsible for managing the maintenance and repair of the Town Council’s key buildings, liaising with external contractors, managing health and safety and our caretaking and cleaning staff as well as having responsibility for our open spaces and grounds management and grounds staff.

The following organisational chart presents the staff structure as of December 2023:



**Uckfield Town Council Office,
The Civic Centre, Uckfield, TN22 1AE**