

MEMBERS' ALLOWANCE TASK & FINISH GROUP MEETING

TOWN HALL

Monday 10 September, 2018

NOTES

Present:

Mayor Bicknell
Cllr Dowling
Cllr I Fradgley
Cllr J Fradgley
Town Clerk
Deputy Town Clerk

1) Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Brain and accepted for the reason given. Councillor Lowe was absent from the meeting.

2) Report and Recommendation

The Town Clerk tabled a report resulting from her meeting with the Chairman of the Independent Members' Allowance Panel, which was also attended by the Deputy Town Clerk.

There was a general feeling of unease amongst the members present in determining a recommendation that would, or would not, result in Stratford-upon-Avon Town Councillors receiving an allowance, as it was thought that the newly elected Council from May 2019 should ultimately make the decision.

It was recognised, however, that the information relating to Members' Allowance and the level set by the Independent Panel would only be available for the new Council to consider if a review had been undertaken. This review and the setting of an appropriate level by the Independent Panel would not necessarily result in STC members taking a Basic Allowance. The level set would remain constant for four years and would be unnegotiable.

As well as the Members' Basic Allowance, the Panel agreed that it is essential to consider a potential alternative such as an Expenses Policy, so that members could still be reimbursed for incidental out of pocket expenses.

It was unanimously AGREED that the consideration of STC's allowance level by the independent panel should form part of the review being undertaken by SDC on 18 October, which enables the cost to be reduced significantly to £490.00 including expenses. The Mayor and Town Clerk would be expected to attend the review to answer any questions that may arise. The Town Clerk has already furnished the Chairman of the Panel with all the relevant information appertaining to STC in order for him to write his report.

In addition, the Governance & Policies Panel should meet to determine a potential Expenses Policy.

It is hoped and anticipated, that the findings of both the external Independent Members' Allowance review and the findings and recommendations of the Governance & Policies Panel will be available for inclusion on the agenda of the Aims & Objectives Workshop, which is being held as part of the Town Council Meeting on 27 November, 2018.

The meeting closed at 3:12pm

MEMBERS' ALLOWANCE PANEL MEETING – 10.9.18

Town Clerk's Open Report

The Town Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk met with the Chairman of the Independent Members' Allowance Panel on Tuesday 4 September, in order to ascertain the procedure for determining the level of the members' allowances in the parish sector.

Dr Declan Hall, had asked for various pieces of information in advance of the meeting, namely:

- The Town Clerk's Open Report to Council detailing the Members' Allowance issue – 29 November, 2017;
- Minutes – 29 November, 2017
- The Annual Report;
- Quality Status;
- Any allowances or benefits received by members;
- Details of Mayor's Allowance;
- Details of overall Civic Budget;
- Calendar of Meetings;
- Details of Sub-groups and their membership;
- The Civic Calendar;
- Expenses incurred by members such as the Civic Dinner, attending Mayoral charity events.

Having read the documents and following a thorough review of the Council's website, Dr Hall was firmly of the opinion that Stratford-upon-Avon Town Council members would have a strong case to claim the Parish Basic Allowance.

The Basic Allowance is intended to recognise the time commitment of all councillors, including such inevitable calls on their time at meetings, including those with officers and constituents and attendance at political group meetings. It is also intended to cover incidental costs.

The Basic Allowance must be the same for each member. For example, a member who serves on three standing committees and two sub-groups, would receive exactly the same as a member who serves on two standing committees and no sub-groups. The Chairman of the Council may receive an enhanced rate (this has nothing to do with the Mayor's Allowance) but it would not be justified at STC, for generally, the Mayor steps down from chairing meetings when they become Mayor, and chairing the Town Council Meeting incurs no greater expense than for the Chairman of any of the five standing committees.

It must be remembered that even if the level of an acceptable Members' Allowance for STC is determined by the Independent Panel, that is not to say that STC will adopt the allowance. Should it do so, it is still up to each individual member of Council to draw it down – they need not do so.

Dr Hall has advised that the Independent Panel is meeting with SDC on 18 October as they are conducting a review of SDC's members' allowances. He suggests that the STC allowance is considered at the same time, which would drastically reduce the cost of the review from thousands of pounds to hundreds. Dr Hall has confirmed the cost would be £490.00, including expenses. The Independent Panel would like the Mayor and Town Clerk in attendance to answer any questions that may arise.

In terms of timing, this would fit neatly into the Aims and Objectives Workshop which is scheduled to take place during the Town Council Meeting on 27 November, 2018.

Town Clerk
10.9.18