

Summary

Up until now WTC Councillors have received no financial compensation for their role, aside from training-related expenses. However, it is increasingly recognised that this creates a barrier not just to entry, but to being an active and effective councillor, particularly for those who are younger, working full or part-time, and / or have child and other caring responsibilities. As part of our ambition to be a more inclusive, open, and accessible council it is proposed that we introduce a small and optional annual allowance for councillors.

Background

Currently most Principal Authority councillors receive an allowance to enable them to spend time working with and for their communities, the majority of Town and Parish councillors do not.

Council and committee meetings are usually held in the evenings, but there are also informal meetings held during the working day. The work of local councillors also includes spending time talking to residents and engaging with local communities, answering emails and signposting residents to services, working with council staff on projects or work streams, being involved in other organisations and charities, reading and understanding reports and proposals, and sharing ideas and helping create proposals for Council.

This is at least partly why most local councils are filled by councillors from a very narrow demographic. The barrier to entry is too high for many, with the demands on time and energy too great for those who would need to balance the role with paid work (more likely those who are younger and from less privileged backgrounds), and with higher caring and domestic responsibilities (more likely women). This excludes many people who would otherwise be able to make vital and important contributions to their local councils and communities.

Please note the allowance that is suggested is not directly related to any of these figures but they have been included as useful background.

- Councillors can easily spend between 3-5 hours per week on WTC related tasks and responsibilities. With additional committee membership, 'meet the councillor', visiting the community, liaising with higher tiers of local government, and engaging and responding with the public, it is anticipated that it may often take upwards of 10 hours per week to be an effective councillor. The Council leader is likely to spend even more time than this.
- Council Meetings have been reorganised and will be held once a month, and although they are scheduled to run for about 2 hours, they can often take longer.
- Time is needed before council meetings to read and digest the papers.
- The Real living wage is currently £12 an hour outside of London (<https://www.livingwage.org.uk/what-real-living-wage>).
- 3 hours a week at real living wage for 48 weeks (assuming 4 weeks holiday) a year is £1,728.

- When Frome Town Council Introduced an allowance of £1500 for Cllrs, the real living wage for the same number of hours per annum was only £1569.
- Childcare in Ware is currently around £85 for a full working day.
- Hertfordshire County Councillor's basic allowance is £11,751 with extras for additional responsibilities and dependent carers' allowance.
- East Herts District Councillor's basic allowance is £5,422.87 with various additional allowances.

Other things to note:

1. The allowance would be administered through the PAYE system, as the allowance is treated as an income and is taxable
2. All members should be paid the same
3. A Cllr co-opted to the Council would not be eligible for the allowance
4. A Cllr can decide not to accept the allowance; indeed, it is anticipated that not all councillors will opt in.

Ware Town Council

WTC has grown and will continue to grow with the future possibility of changes to the unitary authority structure in Hertfordshire. It has an ambitious and full work programme and seems to be 'picking up the slack' of EHDC and HCC for the benefit of the people of Ware. This is reflected in the workload and responsibility of our town councillors.

Local Authorities can do more for and with their communities than the bare minimum that is required of them, and we can offer real value to Ware by doing so. WTC does a lot for Ware and there is incredible power and potential for change in local people taking action. It could be argued that the lack of allowances for Town and Parish Councillors reflects the undervaluation of what they can and do offer.

Ware Town Councillors

- WTC is diverse in terms of councillors ages; with our youngest councillor currently aged 25.
- WTC is not particularly diverse in terms of socioeconomic status.
- Neurodiversity is a strength of WTC with at least four Councillors reporting that they are Neurodiverse.
- Of 11 councillors, just two are women.
- Only one councillor has children under the age of 5.
- Most councillors work full time across a range of different industries, and in a wide variety of roles.
- All 11 councillors are white.

We are not as fully inclusive as we aspire to be. We want to make being an WTC Councillor a viable option for many who have traditionally been put off and excluded from the role. We need to make becoming a councillor more accessible for women and those from poorer backgrounds. We hope that by introducing an allowance now, we will be in much stronger position to encourage an even wider range of people to run for our town council in the next election.

In addition, there are currently some councillors who are struggling to contribute as much as they would like to, or are having to make an unacceptable and unsustainable level of sacrifice in order to do so. While there is obviously not a direct correlation between time and effectiveness, we do think that there is minimum amount of time and energy required to be effective as a councillor. This means that both the council and the town are currently losing out on the voices, perspectives, ideas and energy of councillors who have so much to contribute.

The Proposal

It is proposed we offer an **optional** allowance of £1,750 per councillor.

The names of the councillors accepting the allowance will be published on WTC's website alongside our other financial reports. This would be paid through WTC's payroll.

How this proposal was reached

We are basing our proposal on the idea of equity not equality. If equality is treating everyone the same, then equity is treating everyone according to their needs. Not all councillors need, or even want to accept, an allowance - and by recognising this we feel able to offer a larger amount to a smaller number of councillors for whom it will make a real difference in terms of how much they can participate.

We also recognise that there is no one way to be an effective councillor so accepting the allowance will not be linked to any measurable output, but based on councillors asking themselves the question: "will accepting this allowance help me to be a more effective councillor for my community?". The allowance can be used, among other things, to cover child or other care costs, repay lost earnings to attend meetings, and pay for equipment that will support councillors' work.

While we don't expect this proposal to radically change our council's dynamics, we do hope it will contribute to a more equitable council alongside other changes we make to help break down all boundaries to both becoming and contributing fully as a councillor. We will review the allowance, and how effective it has been, in January 2025.

Recommendation

Introduce an optional Cllr allowance of £1,750 per Cllr