

Squirrels Run
60, West End Road
Mortimer Common
Reading
RG7 3TH

t: 0118 933 2951
m: 0788 997 1300
e: cdlewis@talk21.com

Ref: pcapp4a

4th March 2015

Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council – By Hand

Dear Cllr. Dennett,

I am disappointed that apart from a curt acknowledgement I have not received any response to my letter of 22nd October 2014. You have had the letter for 4.5 months and we are getting close to the election. I set a further letter on 30th January 2015 and I hope that it will not be dealt with in the same dilatory manner.

I have your annual return for the tax year to March 2014 and it shows that you have paid £31,987 in respect of staff costs. This includes a custodian; the job was advertised at a day per week and I assess the total 'all in' cost at £3,640 leaving £28,387 for the Clerk. From the internet I have the same document for Chieveley Parish Council which shows staff costs at £9,426. On a population basis Chieveley is almost exactly 75% of the size of SMPC. This confirms my original statement that other councils of broadly similar size spends less than half what SMPC does on clerking.

I was a member of the panel which interviewed and engaged the current Clerk. I believe that she was engaged on a standard NALC contract of employments and job description at 832 hours a year and on around SP18. When she started there were some unusual circumstances in that there were several office moves in a short time and the paperwork that she took over was less than ideal; this resulted in her working virtually full time though the intention was that this would only be in the short term. It was a moot point that I do not believe that there should be employer's pension contributions in respect of overtime. Keith Davies then took over as Chairman and I can prove that through the FGP he was bypassing the Council and taking executive decisions with financial consequences; I believe that this included amendments to the Clerk's terms of engagement. I realised that this was happening and have a letter stating that even though I was a councillor I could not attend FGP meetings because confidential matters were discussed. I believe that the cost of clerking between around 1998 and 2005 went from around £5k to £25k. Regardless of whether I am elected or not I will express my concerns to the internal and external auditor.

I do not have access to the members only part of the NALC web site but I believe that if the Clerk were hypothetically to resign then the post would be advertised at 832 hours at around £11.00 per hour giving an 'all in' annual cost of around £11k as against the £28k that you are currently paying. There may be some minor error in the figures but the current position is unsustainable.

I have mentioned two instances where I believe that the Clerk has broken the law. In my view if an employee breaks the law in the course of her employment it is best if the employer deals with it. That being said as the complainant I need to be assured that you are dealing with the matters properly.

By 20th March please advise [1] if you disagree with any of the factual assertions that I have made, [2] if there is any good reason why I do not make them in public and [3] that you have properly dealt with the law breaking points. In the absence of any reply I will feel free to mention them in public.

Yours sincerely

Chris Lewis