

STRATFORD-UPON-AVON TOWN COUNCIL

15 September 2026

Town Clerk's Open Report

1. Local Government Re-Organisation Update

- **To note the Government's decision to pause and review the Local Government Reorganisation programme in Warwickshire;**
- **That the Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation Working Group continue to monitor the ongoing programme and bring forward any recommendations where there are potential implications or opportunities for the Town Council.**
- **That consideration be given to making an appropriate budget provision in 2027/28 to enable business cases to be prepared for any assets that may be offered to the Town Council, to ensure that the financial, operational and other implications of any potential transfer can be properly assessed.**

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) programme in Warwickshire, following the Government's recent announcement that the proposed reorganisation process has been paused and will be reviewed for Warwickshire.

Background

In July 2026 the Government confirmed proposals for Warwickshire to move from the existing two-tier local government structure to two new unitary authorities.

The proposed authorities were:

North Warwickshire Council – covering North Warwickshire, Nuneaton and Bedworth, and Rugby; and
South Warwickshire Council – covering Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick.

The previous timetable anticipated that the new authorities would become operational in April 2028, following elections in May 2027 to establish Shadow Authorities.

Change in Government Position

The Government announced on 7 September that the LGR programme in Warwickshire has been paused and will be reviewed.

The implications of this decision are not yet fully known and the previous timetable and arrangements should not be regarded as current or confirmed.

The existing principal authorities will continue to operate pending further direction from Government. It has also been advised that the May 2027 local elections will proceed on the existing council boundaries.

The Government's review means that a number of the arrangements previously being developed, including the proposed Shadow Authorities, new unitary boundaries and implementation timetable, may now be subject to change.

Potential Asset Transfers

Although the timetable for LGR is now uncertain, the potential transfer of community assets remains an area which the Town Council should continue to monitor.

Prior to the Government's announcement, Stratford-on-Avon District Council has been considering arrangements whereby community assets / functions could potentially be transferred to Town and Parish Councils.

Such transfers could provide opportunities for the Town Council where an asset has a clear community benefit and where local ownership would provide a sustainable long-term solution.

The transfer of an asset or service should not be regarded as beneficial simply because ownership or responsibility is transferred to the Town Council. The full-life cost and associated liabilities must be established before any commitment is made.

Any proposed transfer would need to consider:

- the condition of the asset;
- capital investment requirements;
- ongoing revenue costs;
- future maintenance;
- staffing and operational capacity;
- legal responsibilities and liabilities;
- insurance;
- health and safety;
- service standards;
- potential income generation; and
- the long-term sustainability of the arrangement.

The District Council has indicated that its proposed asset transfer framework is expected to be considered in October 2026 and it is expected that it will outline the require evidence required:

- appropriate governance arrangements;
- financial sustainability;
- a long-term management plan;
- the ability to maintain and manage the asset; and
- compliance with Equality, Diversity and Climate Change principles.

The Town Council should continue to monitor this work irrespective of the current position on LGR, as opportunities for community asset ownership may arise independently of the reorganisation programme.

Prior to the recent announcement, the Town Council has approached the District Council for information on public open spaces, play areas and other assets that may potentially be considered for transfer, together with their associated costs. The District Council advised that it is still at an early stage of considering asset transfers and is not yet in a position to identify which assets may be suitable. Baseline work is ongoing, and detailed costs for individual open spaces and play areas are not currently available as grounds maintenance expenditure is not recorded on a site-by-site basis.

Financial Planning

Any potential transfer of assets would likely require a business case to be prepared, and the associated costs should therefore be factored into the 2027/28 budget-setting process.

Next Steps

The Town Council will continue to monitor the Government's review of LGR and any subsequent announcements regarding the future structure and timetable for local government in Warwickshire.

The Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation Working Group will look to consider matters where relevant to the Town Council and will bring forward recommendations where appropriate.

2. Members' Allowances

- **To consider the annual review.**

It is a requirement of the Council's Terms of Reference that an annual review of members' allowances is undertaken.

As Councillors are aware, Stratford-upon-Avon Town Councillors do not currently receive an allowance for their service. However, reimbursement may be claimed for expenses incurred whilst undertaking official Council business, such as car parking charges when attending meetings or performing civic duties.

The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 provide the framework enabling local councils to pay allowances to their members. Such allowances are intended to compensate Councillors for their time and expenses incurred in carrying out their duties. The adoption of such a scheme is discretionary and rests with each individual council.

The Mayor receives a separate allowance to cover expenses incurred during his or her Mayoral year.

Councillors are now asked to review the current position and determine whether they wish to consider investigating the implementation of a basic allowance scheme for members, or whether no change is required.

3. Proposal of a relationship with Skien, Norway – Ibsen Bicentenary

- **To consider an invitation received by the Mayor from the City of Skien in Telemark, Norway, and to seek Council's views on whether the invitation should be explored further.**

Background

The Mayor has received an approach from Skien in Telemark, Norway, the birthplace of the renowned Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen. Skien has proposed establishing a relationship with Stratford-upon-Avon in connection with the bicentenary of Ibsen's birth on 20 March 2028.

The proposal suggests that a relationship could provide opportunities for:

- Joint promotion and marketing of the two towns as destinations for visitors interested in Shakespeare and Ibsen;
- Exchange of staff, knowledge and expertise between heritage and cultural organisations;
- Opportunities for cultural and educational exchanges; and
- Greater international reach for both towns.

The Mayor has been invited to visit Skien for the opening of the Ibsen bicentenary celebrations on 20 March 2028, and Skien has offered to send a small delegation to Stratford-upon-Avon during 2027.

Stratford-upon-Avon's Existing International Relationships

Members are reminded that earlier in the current administration, Council agreed that the Town should focus its international town relationships on the Stratfords of the World, rather than developing a wider range of individual international town links.

Considerations

The approach from Skien is somewhat different from twinning requests, we receive.

Whilst there is a cultural connection between the towns, as the birthplaces of Shakespeare and Ibsen, the Town Council does not currently have the staffing, expertise or budget to develop and actively market an international cultural partnership.

Opportunities such as joint tourism marketing, cultural exchanges and developing new audiences would be more appropriately led by organisations within the town with the relevant expertise and resources.

The Town Council can, however, play a civic role, including welcoming a delegation to the Town Hall and making appropriate introductions.

Any future relationship should not create an expectation of ongoing funding or resources from the Town Council unless specifically agreed by Council.

Skien has also specifically asked whether the Town Council would be willing to make an introduction between their national Ibsen Stage company, and the Royal Shakespeare Company and this has been done. In addition, the District Council, Birthplace Trust and Shakespeare England have been forwarded the email.

Options

Councillors may agree to enter into an initial conversation with Skien to explore the potential for a cultural and heritage relationship, recognising that there may be financial and resource implications should the Town Council be expected to develop and manage the relationship independently.

Alternatively, Councillors may wish to politely decline the approach, given the Town Council's existing commitment to the Stratfords of the World network but extend an invitation to them to visit the Town Hall if visiting the town.

4. National Salary Award 2026/27

- **That the Council notes the 2026/27 NJC pay award of 3.3% with effect from 1 April 2026.**

Members are advised that the National Joint Council (NJC) has agreed the pay award for Local Government employees for 2026/27. The award provides for a 3.3% increase in salaries and allowances with effect from 1 April 2026.

5. South Warwickshire Local Plan – Regulation 19 Consultation

- **That the action be noted.**

The Regulation 19 consultation on the South Warwickshire Local Plan (SWLP) has taken place since the last meeting. The consultation commenced on 21 July 2026 and closed on 8 September 2026. The Regulation 19 stage represents the final statutory consultation before the Plan is submitted for independent examination and is intended to provide the strategic planning framework for South Warwickshire through to 2050. Attached as an **Appendix**

Councillors had met with the Town Council's Planning Consultant to consider the Council's response Town Council. Following this meeting, a formal representation was prepared and submitted within the consultation deadline.

6. Standing Orders

- **To consider the suggestion of a Working Group to work alongside the Town Clerk in reviewing the Standing Orders.**

The Town Clerk is currently undertaking a review of the Council's Standing Orders, with a view to bringing them into line with the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) model Standing Orders.

It is proposed that, at the September Council meeting, a Working Group be established to review and assess the revised Standing Orders prior to their submission to the Governance, Finance and Resources Committee at its November meeting. The Committee will then consider the revised Standing Orders and make a recommendation to Council.

Any Member of the Council may be invited to serve on the Working Group.

Town Clerk and Chief Officer