

Dear Parents,

As you are aware, an email was sent on 3 April giving advance notice that the fees for the 2019-20 season will be increasing.

A number of you have expressed dissatisfaction at this news. Some of this has been directed verbally at the coaches which is unfair as they are not involved in the financial management of the Club.

The decision to increase membership fees was taken collectively and with the unanimous support of all Trustees (Steve Willis, Emily Davis, Paul West, Simon Squire, Neil Cottey and Mark Warner). All of the Trustees, with the exception of our Treasurer Neil Cottey, are parents who have children participating in the Youth programme, so they too are directly impacted by the decisions being made.

A few weeks ago, three parents from the Under 11 group wrote to the Trustees and asked for a meeting to discuss matters in more detail. A meeting was arranged with them on 15 April, following which they will give feedback directly to the Under 11 parents.

Some of the points discussed are only relevant to the Under 11 group, but others (including the concern about the fee increase) are more general and I hope will be of benefit to share in a wider context – to aid understanding of the rationale behind the rate rise.

Firstly, it is important to clarify that our Club's purpose, as per the registration with the Charities Commission, is to advance amateur sport and promote community participation in healthy recreation through the provision of sports coaching and access to facilities for football players in school years 6-11 who live in and around Taunton. Allied to this, all funds raised by our Club must be used for the advancement of the above.

Although the programme was established by Taunton Town Football Club Limited (TTFCL), our Club now operates independently. As things stand, we receive no financial support from the main club. Likewise, and perhaps most importantly, none of the money we receive or raise is passed over to Taunton Town FC. Our Club does not and legally cannot subsidise the playing budget for TTFCL.

For the past year, our Club has operated 'hand to mouth' using all available income to pay for coaches, hire of pitches and the purchase of essential equipment. At times, we have been operating in deficit, relying on the goodwill and commitment of coaches who have had to wait for payments to be made to them. For this reason, please do not direct any anger and frustration towards them; it is misplaced and unfair to the individuals, many of whom run additional training sessions at their own expense.

To secure the future of our Club, we require working capital to invest in the future of the programme. Currently, we have none.

When the initial fee of £350 per season was set 2 years ago by TTFCL for the match squads (and £180 for the training group), it was largely based on educated guesswork as there was no historical information to use for budgeting purposes.

Our status in becoming recognised as a Charity only happened in December 2018 and it has taken some considerable time and effort for the Trustees to fully separate the financial situation from the main club. Again, in the interests of clarity and transparency, the Trustees who now look after the

financial and operational management of Club do this completely free of charge (and will always do so). Also, they do not routinely claim 'expenses' which they are legally entitled to do if they so wish.

We now know that annual membership charges of £350 for match squad players and £180 for training/development squad players is not sufficient to cover the running costs of the Club. If we don't increase the membership fees, the Youth programme will not be financially viable and will have no choice but to close, meaning we will not operate in 2019-20 season and the Club will cease to exist.

The decision to increase fees is not something that will ever be taken lightly.

The largest proportion of our costs goes to the coaches for their time and expertise in coaching young players. After that, the second highest cost is for Club admin which includes everything from confirming matches, organising referees, paying suppliers and monitoring payments. Amongst other things we now have to budget for (which were not factored into the handover information we received from TTFCL) are players' insurance and ground maintenance at Heron Drive. Furthermore, we need to make due allowance for hiring 3G pitches to play matches should we experience extended periods of bad weather. Unfortunately for us, the availability of such facilities in the Taunton area is poor and, as such, comes at a high cost.

We have thought long and hard about the fee situation, recognising that any increase would not go down well. In setting the fees for the 2019-20 season consideration has been given to immediate running costs and the desire to not increase fees again for the next few years at least.

If we get more support from you as parents with fundraising (e.g. each year group taking responsibility for generating a target income figure), we hope this will be the last increase needed for several years. We have a vision for the Club which includes being able to offer financial assistance for players from low income families, taking some players on tour and possibly even looking into paying for qualifications (referee or coaching) for U16s before they leave our programme. None of this is possible at present, but could become a reality if we have a stronger financial footing.

We have listened to your feedback and concerns about the proposed change to the payment schedule. In an attempt to reduce admin and secure income up front in the 3 April email, we announced the intention to move to three payments. In light of feedback from multiple families across multiple year groups, we will **revert to the original position of collecting 10 equal monthly payments.**

I hope this communication will go some way to explaining our position but please speak with me (or any of the other Trustees) directly if you have any further questions. A number of us will be at the end of season presentation on 18 May, but please don't wait until then if you'd like to talk with us. We are parents of committed players like you, and it's totally safe to connect with us directly if you wish. You can find out more information about us under the Welfare section of the Club's website: <https://youth.tauntontown.com/Trustees.php>

For our Club to continue to grow and prosper in the future, for the benefit of all of our children, we need support from all our members. If you are reading this and have skills, contacts, funds or time available to help (perhaps as a Trustee or as a part of a management group) please contact me. Any and all contributions will be gratefully received. As Trustees we are committed to making this Club a success and something that Taunton can be proud of. We hope you feel the same.

Yours faithfully,

Steve Willis  
Chairperson

Mobile: 07912 054091

Email: [beamswillis@btinternet.com](mailto:beamswillis@btinternet.com)