

PROVINCIAL GRAND ALMONER'S REPORT

for PROVINCIAL GRAND LODGE to be held on 25th MAY 2017

THE MCF (MASONIC CHARITABLE FOUNDATION):

The new 'combined' charity went live legally on 1st April 2016 but it has taken a full year for the offices to be revamped. Staff also had to be appointed and/or re-trained to be: multi-tasking across all charities, used to the new Application Forms and procedures, settled into their new roles and be able to use the new software developed to run MCF cases.

The week beginning 3rd April 2017 was when this all went into operation and Provinces are being introduced to it in staggered phases so as not to overload the system. Norfolk will have its 'Visiting Volunteers' in place and trained by an MCF expert before the start of the next Masonic Year.

These 'Visiting Volunteers' will visit and complete all applications from people who request assistance by the MCF but will liaise with the Almoner and myself when visiting. The MCF's aim is to reduce the time taken to reach an outcome from the present 6 – 8 weeks to less than a week.

MCF GRANTS TO NORFOLK:

In the last 5 years to end December 2016 Norfolk received grants totalling £866,093 with £204,622 in the last 12 months. You will see that over the five-year period of raising money for a Festival we get back a huge amount to spend on our Norfolk Brethren, wives/partners, children and widows.

Of course the Almoners, the Norfolk Charities Committee and I, manage the distribution of this to them but we also look after Brethren and widows from other Provinces who live in Norfolk but do not show up on our statistics.

MEDICAL ISSUES:

We all know that the NHS has problems with long delays in referrals to a consultant and then even longer delays to have an operation if that is what is necessary. It was recently announced that replacement hip and knee joint operations were to be deferred to create time and space for other work.

If a GP refers a Brother, members of his family or a Lodge widow to a consultant and the wait appears too long, then ring me and I can ask the MCF to arrange a private consultation (no financial assessment needed).

If a NHS operation is needed and the wait might be several months, then talk to me about options as the process might be able to be accelerated or even done privately, thus more quickly.

ONE SHOULD NOT WAIT BUT CONTACT ME AS SOON AS YOU HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT AN OPERATION IS NEEDED.

My details are in the Year Book (01603 867603).

ALMONERS:

Lodge Almoners should, and do, check, visit and report to the Lodge on the health and well-being of the members and the Lodge widows. They do a great job but there is increasing need for them to flag up cases of need so that the Visiting Volunteers and I can see what help might be available. This obviously includes Masonic help from the MCF but extends beyond this and so they should also be recruiting agents for the Masonic charity.

There is an Almoners support section on the MCF website which has a wealth of information for them and so now expect to see your Almoner adding and referring to some items from it when he stands up to give his normal report on the members and widows.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

All Almoners understand that they must maintain confidentiality.

However, if you need help you may not wish your Almoner or indeed members of the Lodge know all your business.

Should you need support from the Province or from the MCF then you might want someone other than the Lodge Almoner to be involved. If so, then ring me and I will ensure that someone outside the Lodge will see you.

In his report to the Lodge the Almoner sometimes gives medical details of illness but he should only do so if he has checked with you what you want him to say. He should not give out details 'willy-nilly' and so have a word if he is too graphic!

THE NORFOLK RESPITE BREAK SCHEME:

The Scheme continues to help Norfolk Freemasons, their wives/partners and Lodge widows who need a break to recover from mental stress, recuperation from illness or medical treatment, or just plainly need to have a little time away to refresh the batteries. This Scheme is well funded from Lodge donations, requires no intrusive financial enquiry to be made and for many it is free! Give Robin Shaw (01263 837241) or myself a ring to discuss.

Andrew Mason, PGA

775 words