

Report of the Managing Director

**FREEDOM OF THE BOROUGH OF WELLINGBOROUGH**

**1 Purpose of report**

This report invites council to consider potential changes to current practice for awarding the title of Honorary Freeman of the Borough of Wellingborough.

**2 Executive summary**

For many years the council has appointed former councillors, and The Royal Anglian Regiment, to the office of Honorary Freeman, and – in more recent times – a serving councillor. This report considers whether council should change current custom and practice to increase the number of people on whom the award is conferred at any one time.

**3 Appendices**

Appendix A – Admission of Honorary Freeman since 1980.

**4 Proposed action:**

**The council is invited to RESOLVE to**

- 4.1 increase the total number of councillors or former councillors to whom the award of Honorary Freeman is conferred from four to six;**
- 4.2 delegate the decision on which individuals should be awarded this honour – in compliance with the criteria set out below - to the managing director in consultation with the leader of the council and the leader of the opposition;**
- 4.3 set aside a maximum of £8,000 from reserves to arrange a special council meeting specifically to award the honours to four new Honorary Freeman, followed by a reception, during 2018/19.**

**5 Background**

- 5.1 There is a long history of municipal boroughs granting the Freedom of the Borough to “persons of distinction and any persons who have rendered eminent services to the borough”. This council has taken the opportunity to honour former or serving councillors in the same way since 1980. At present two former councillors hold that office, along with The Royal Anglian Regiment. In total 10 Honorary Freeman have been admitted; nine to former or serving councillors plus one to The Royal Anglian Regiment.

- 5.2 Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, allows that “a relevant authority may admit to be honorary freemen or honorary freewomen of the place or area for which it is the authority - (a) persons of distinction, and (b) persons who have, in the opinion of the authority, rendered eminent services to that place or area”.
- 5.3 Members may wish to note that parish councils also have the power to award this type of honour, as do charter trustees, so the potential for similar future awards (by the relevant authorities) would remain, regardless of the structure of local government in Northamptonshire.

## **6 Discussion**

- 6.1 The council has in the past admitted individuals as Honorary Freemen who, in its opinion, could be regarded as councillors or former councillors who have “rendered eminent services” to the borough. There has been no formal policy in place, but it has been the practice to award the honour to a maximum of four people.
- 6.2 Given the potential for local government reorganisation in Northamptonshire, and with it the likely retirement of a number of existing councillors who have served in office for many years, council may wish to review whether to extend that informal agreement to six (or some other number). This would admit four new Honorary Freemen in addition to the two currently in office.
- 6.3 A cost would be attached to the award of this honour, amounting to approximately £1200 per award – for a scroll, entry into the official records, and signwriting on the Freedom of the Borough board. This expenditure is permitted by Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972. In the past the Mayor has also hosted a small reception after the event. Since no budget is earmarked for this unplanned expenditure, the funding would need to be covered by reserves.
- 6.4 There is a requirement that a special council meeting is convened to make the award(s), at which meeting no less than two thirds of members who vote must agree to pass the resolution to bestow the honour.
- 6.5 Honorary Freemen may attend civic ceremonies as the council may decide, but shall not have the right to influence meetings of the council, or a committee of the council, or to receive any allowance or other payment under the Members’ Allowance Scheme. It is recommended that civic ceremonies to which Honorary Freemen may be invited are: full council meetings, the annual meeting of the council, the civic service, the Remembrance Day service and parade, Freedom Ceremonies, civic funerals, and celebratory or commemorative events.
- 6.6 It is proposed that, if members determine that four new Honorary Freemen be admitted, the managing director be delegated to identify those individuals. This would be based on evidence in relation to the contribution made to the borough during their terms of office, and following consultation with the leader of the

council and the leader of the opposition, and the reasons for the choices would be documented.

## **7 Legal powers**

Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended.

## **8 Financial and value for money implications**

The Act permits expenditure in relation to the award of the Freedom of the Borough. The costs likely to be involved are outlined above. These costs would be for four awards, plus a modest reception after the Council meeting, and would amount to a sum of approximately £8,000. The proposal is to identify this sum from reserves since no budget had been allocated to the ceremony because, by their nature, it is not usually possible to plan awards of this kind up to eighteen months in advance.

## **9 Risk analysis**

There are no risks associated with this proposal. Whilst there would be some unplanned expenditure it is not expected that this would have an impact on existing services.

## **10 Implications for resources**

On the rare occasion of conferment of any honorary title, there will be a resource implication for Democratic Services in administering the award process.

## **11 Implications for equalities and stronger and safer communities**

There are no implications of this nature as the council will confer the award based on service to the borough and use this as an objective rationale.

## **12 Author and contact officer**

Bridget Gamble, Director

## **13 Consultees**

Liz Elliott, Managing Director

Julie Thomas, Director

Karen Denton, Vicki Jessop, Adrian Piper – Assistant Directors

Fiona Hubbard – Democratic Services Officer (Mayoral)

Carol Mundy – Democratic Services Officer (Committees)

## **14 Background papers**

All background papers are in the public domain, save internal emails discussing the costs and arrangements.



**Admission of Honorary Freeman**

The following have been admitted as Honorary Freeman since 1980:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Date of admission</b>
Bertie A J Taylor	11 March 1980
Harry (Cyril) L Warwick	10 April 1984
The Royal Anglian Regiment	27 April 1985
Charles F Robinson	10 March 1988
Derek F Hooton, OBE	10 July 2003
Edwin A Coleman, MBE	10 July 2003
John L H Bailey	16 May 2013
Graham T Ridge	16 May 2013
Geoffrey P Timms	16 May 2013
Eileen Higgins	13 October 2017

