

**REPORT TO: EXECUTIVE & COUNCIL**

**Date of Meeting: 7 October 2014 & 15 October 2014**

**Report of: Corporate Manager, Democratic & Civic Support**

**Title: FREEDOM OF THE CITY**

**Is this a Key Decision?**

No

**Is this an Executive or Council Function?**

**Council**

**1. What is the report about?**

- 1.1 This report sets out a proposal to offer the Freedom of the City to Mrs Yolonda Henson in recognition of her dedication to the serving the City over 32 years of elected representation.
- 1.2 It also suggests that the Freedom of the City be offered to Jo Pavey (the athlete), as well as Liam Tancock (the swimmer) for their outstanding services to the field of sport which has led to Exeter's name being known around the world as one which supports sport.
- 1.3 The report also gives details of an on-line petition suggesting that the Freedom of the City be given to Chris Martin (of Coldplay) as well as suggesting that future nominations for such an honour be considered against set criteria.

**2. Recommendations:**

- 2.1 That in accordance with Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972, an Extraordinary meeting of the Council be arranged, on the rising of the Ordinary meeting of the Council on 15 October 2014, to consider granting the Freedom of the City to Mrs Yolonda Henson, Mrs Jo Pavey and Mr Liam Tancock.
- 2.2 That officers draw up a list of criteria against which future nominations can be considered.

**3. Reasons for the recommendation:**

- 3.1 Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972, gives Councils the power to grant "Freedom of the City" to any individual who it feels has given eminent service to the City.
- 3.2 To this end, an Extraordinary meeting of the full Council must be convened to specifically consider this matter, with two thirds of those present, voting in favour.
- 3.3 If the recommendation contained in this report is accepted by The Executive and subsequently adopted by full Council, an Extraordinary meeting of the Council will therefore be organised immediately after the ordinary meeting of the Council scheduled for 15 October 2014, when Members will be asked to consider granting the Freedom of the City to Mrs Yolonda Henson, Mrs Jo Pavey and Mr Liam Tancock.

3.4 It is also suggested that so as to maintain the dignity associated with the award of such an honour, a set of criteria be drawn up against which future nominations can be considered.

**4. What are the resource implications including non financial resources.**

4.1 Other than a small cost in preparing a suitable ceremonial scroll and hosting a small reception, there are no resource implications.

**5. Section 151 Officer comments:**

5.1 No comment.

**6. What are the legal aspects?**

6.1 No comment.

**7. Monitoring Officer's comments:**

7.1 No comment.

**8. Report details:**

8.1 In the case of Mrs Yolonda Henson, the Council is asked to consider bestowing this honour due to her unstinting duty of public service over a total of 32 years elected service on the City Council, including a number as the Leader of the Conservative Group, as well as Mayor of the City in 1992. Throughout that time, she always put the best interests of the residents of the City and the future of the City itself first.

8.2 In the case of Mrs Jo Pavey, the Council is asked to consider bestowing the honour to her due to her services to sport, particularly athletics, which culminated in her winning the Gold Medal in the 2014 European Championships, as well as a Bronze Medal in the 2014 Commonwealth Games. She has been a member of the Exeter Harriers Athletics Club since 1987, and has been the 5000m national champion on no less than 6 occasions. She regularly trains at the Exeter Arena.

8.3 As to Liam Tancock, the Council is asked to consider bestowing the honour on him, due to his services to sport, particularly swimming, where he has amassed a series of 3 world and 5 commonwealth championships, as well as holding the world record for the 50m backstroke. He has been a member of the Exeter Swimming Club for a number of years.

8.4 It is felt appropriate that Mrs Pavey and Mr Tancock are awarded the honour now, as it reflects the Council's on-going commitment to sport within the City and its aspirations for the City to be nationally recognised as such.

8.5 It would be appropriate at this point, to mention that the position of Freeman of the City of Exeter has been awarded since 1266 for a variety of reasons. Originally, many paid a fine to the City to take up the honour, whilst others provided work for an apprentice; and others have been awarded the honour for various acts of local or national importance (for example, the Captain of HMS Exeter which was involved in the Battle of the River Plate in 1939, was given the Freedom of the City). These

days, the majority of applications for Freeman of the City have been hereditary as the Council allows a relative of a previous Freeman to apply to take up that honour by proving their lineage. Most recently, the Council has awarded the honour to those who have served the City in a public role (former Member of Parliament Sir John Hannam; David Morrish and Mrs Saxon Spence).

- 8.5 Whilst there is no reason why such awards shouldn't continue to be made (as is the case suggested here with Mrs Henson), it is suggested that maybe now is the time to consider widening the opportunities for the honour to be given. This would allow those, such as Mrs Pavey and Mr Tancock, and others who have done a lot for the City and/or promoted Exeter to a wide audience, to also be considered.
- 8.6 This is particularly pertinent now considering the recent on-line petition which received 89 signatures requesting the Council to consider giving the honour to Chris Martin of Coldplay. This e-petition was backed up by a world-wide social media campaign which received over 2,000 supporters.
- 8.7 There are no hard and fast rules as to the grounds for nomination with the Council being given the ability to award it to whomever it sees fit. It is suggested that this is an appropriate time to consider setting some criteria by which future applications can be considered. Officers will therefore undertake the necessary research and report back their findings with suggested criteria to the next meeting of the Executive.

## **9. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?**

- 9.1 Consideration of widening the remit for nominations for the Freedom of the City will help promote the City as a regional capital and one which supports those who support and promote the City as such.

## **10. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?**

- 10.1 There are no risks associated with the proposals.

## **11. What is the impact of the decision on equality and diversity; health and wellbeing; safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults, community safety and the environment?**

- 11.1 Consideration of widening the remit of nominations for the Freedom of the City will encourage nominations from all aspects of City life. The approval of criteria against which such nominations will be considered, will ensure that all nominations are treated equally and judged appropriately.

## **12. Are there any other options?**

- 12.1 Continue with the existing scheme where nominations rarely come forward other than in respect of public service.

**John Street**  
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Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)  
Background papers used in compiling this report:-

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