

REPORT TO Executive

Date of Meeting: 12 December 2017

Report of: Corporate Manager, Democratic & Civic Support

Title: FREEDOM OF THE CITY – EMERGENCY SERVICES

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Council

1.1 What is the report about?

- 1.1 The Council, at its meeting on 17 October 2017, deferred consideration of a Notice of Motion regarding the offer of the Freedom of the City to the three emergency services, to the Executive.
- 1.2 This report asks the Executive to consider whether the Freedom of the City should be offered to the Devon & Cornwall Constabulary, the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service, and the South West Ambulance Service Trust, in recognition of the service they give in going above and beyond the call of duty for the citizens of this great City 24/7, 365 days a year without thought for themselves. It also sets out the responses from the organisations concerned.

2. Recommendation:

- 2.1 That the Executive consider this matter and make an appropriate recommendation to the Council.

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 The matter of whether Freedom of the City should be offered to the emergency services is a difficult one, as whilst there can be no argument that the service they provide to the residents of the City meets some of the criteria against which such nominations are considered, the precedent which such an award would set for other organisations who, it could be felt, offer similar levels of service to the residents of Exeter, cannot be ignored.
- 3.3 If a recommendation to offer the Freedom of the City is put forward and subsequently adopted by full Council, legislation dictates that an Extraordinary meeting of the Council must be convened to specifically consider this matter, with two thirds of those present, voting in favour.
- 3.4 Members are reminded of the following four criteria against which nominations for Freeman of the City are considered:-
 - For those who have extraordinarily served the community over a number of years (minimum of 20 years) in a voluntary or professional capacity;

- For those who have achieved national, international or world recognition for excellence in their particular field of expertise (be it business, entrepreneurial, sport, or any other area);
- For those who have promoted Exeter during their career so as to significantly raise the profile of the City on a national, international or world basis;
- For those who have via a particularly extraordinary act, or series of acts, put the safety or well being of themselves secondary to those of others.

3.5 The following nomination has been received:-

“This Council support bestowing Freedom of the City status on the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary, Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service and the Southwest Ambulance Service Trust who have, over the years, gone above and beyond the call of duty for the citizens of this great City 24/7, 365 days a year without thought for themselves.”

3.5 As such, it meets several of the above criteria against which such nominations should be assessed.

3.6 As is customary with any nominations which are felt worthy of consideration, all three of the nominated organisations have been contacted to offer their response to this nomination. The organisations concerned have responded as follows:-

Chief Fire Officer - Devon Fire & Rescue Service

“We would be delighted to accept should the Executive Committee consider awarding the Freedom of the City to the Service. This considerable honour would be a reflection of the tremendous effort and dedication of each and every one of our operational and support staff who together ensure that the Fire and Rescue Service in Devon and Somerset provides the very best service to the public. All too often, Firefighters have to face truly harrowing situations to save life or recover people from truly traumatic and distressing incidents and whilst this is not done for thanks or favour, recognition of the high esteem in which staff are held is sometimes a comfort to staff who are affected by some of the tragic incidents they attend. Public support, evidenced through the award of the Freedom of the City would reinforce the value in which the staff (and the activities the Fire and Rescue Service does) are held and would be an immense privilege and an honour. In addition, at the Fire Authority meeting on the 20th October 2017, The Fire Authority were as one and supported the acceptance of such and honour, should it be awarded.”

Chief Executive - South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust

“On behalf of South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust I would like to thank Exeter City Council Executive Committee for considering this service for the Freemanship and I would like to confirm that we would accept this honour if it were approved.

The service would be honoured to receive the Freedom of the City and this would serve as great recognition for the hard work of our staff in supporting the community we are proud to serve.”

Chief Constable - Devon and Cornwall Constabulary

“May I, through your offices, thank the Council for their generosity in considering bestowing the Freedom of the City on Devon and Cornwall Constabulary.

The consideration alone confirms the understanding and support that frontline staff and the wider organisation receive from the City. We have, together, lived through challenging times, much of which continues today. The opportunity to receive such Freedom is a testament to the strength of that relationship. The Freedom of the City in any time, is humbling but during a time when the City itself is under such challenge yet has a clear vision of growth which embraces the very young to the eldest and those of difference, would be to receive the Freedom of a City whose values accord with those of Devon and Cornwall Constabulary.”

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

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

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

- 5.1 There are no financial implications to consider in this report.

6. What are the legal aspects?

- 6.1 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.

7. Monitoring Officer’s comments:

- 7.1 This report raises no issues for the Deputy Monitoring Officer.

8. Report details:

- 8.1 This report is as a consequence of the Council decision at its meeting on 17th October 2017, to refer the following Notice of Motion to the Executive for consideration:-

“This Council support bestowing Freedom of the City status on the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary, Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service and the Southwest Ambulance Service Trust who have, over the years, gone above and beyond the call of duty for the citizens of this great City 24/7, 365 days a year without thought for themselves.”

- 8.2 As such, it meets several of the criteria set down by the Council against which any nominations for Freedom of the City are considered.

- 8.3 If a recommendation to offer the Freedom of the City was to be approved, it would be the first time that the Freedom of the City has been awarded by the City Council, to organisations other than military organisations (of which the City is currently affiliated with 6).
- 8.4 This in itself, is no reason not to approve this nomination, but Members must be cognisant of the precedent this may set for further nominations being put forward for other organisations who it may be felt have provided a similar level of service to the residents of Exeter.
- 8.5 Members are reminded that public recognition of the work of the emergency services can take many forms, not necessarily linked to the granting of the Freedom of the City.
- 8.6 For example, the Council in July 2008 accepted the following notice of motion put forward by Cllr Newby:-

That the citizens of this City through its Council and elected Members hold a day of thanks for the three emergency services to show their gratitude for their dedication and professionalism that they show to us in our hour of need and more so after the incident in Princesshay on 22 May that put so many lives at risk

- 8.7 As a consequence, a “Blue Light Parade” was held on 28th March 2009 which was attended by representatives of not only the three organisations now nominated, but also the Royal Naval Bomb Disposal Squad who had been involved in the particular incident referred to.
- 8.8 A further example of public recognition, is that in relation to the Cathedral Yard fire in October 2016, when a Service of Thanksgiving was held in the Cathedral to thank all those involved in that event including, but not exclusively, the emergency services now nominated. There was also a reception held at the Guildhall.
- 8.9 Freedom of the City for military organisations allows them to march through the streets “with drums beating, colours flying and bayonets fixed.” For an individual, the Freedom gives them limited privileges other than the ability to drive a flock of sheep through the City Centre.
- 8.5 If a recommendation to offer the Freedom of the City was approved in this case, a suitable way for those organisations to exercise that freedom would have to be devised as there is no precedent to work with.

9. How does the decision contribute to the Council’s Corporate Plan?

- 9.1 This decision 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 None applicable with this decision

12. Are there any other options?

- 12.1 The Council could decide not to make the award, but find an alternative way in which to recognise the work and on-going commitment to the City of the emergency services, such as those referred to earlier in the report

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

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