

REPORT TO Executive

Date of Meeting: 10 February 2015

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 details a proposal to set criteria against which future nominations for Freedom of the City can be judged.

2. Recommendations:

2.1 That the following criteria be adopted against which future nominations for Freedom of the City of Exeter

- 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.

2.2 That provision be made for the withdrawal of this award in line with the Council's adopted scheme for the enrolment of Honorary Aldermen.

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. 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.

3.2 Members will recall that at an Extraordinary meeting of the Council held on 15 October 2014, the Freedom of the City was granted to Mrs Yolonda

Henson, Mrs Jo Pavey and Mr Liam Tancock.

3.3 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 This report raises no issues of a financial nature.

6. What are the legal aspects?

6.1 The provisions for the award of Freeman of the City are contained within Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1974.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

7.1 This report raises no issues for the Monitoring Officer.

8. Report details:

8.1 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).

8.2 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, Mrs Saxon Spence and as mentioned above, Mrs Yolonda Henson), although as mentioned above, two local prominent athletes were also recently awarded the honour, due to their promotion of Exeter to a much wider audience.

8.3 These days, the majority of applications for Freeman of the City have been on an hereditary basis, as the Council allows a relative of a previous Freeman to apply to take up that honour by proving their lineage.

8.4 Officers have undertaken some research with other Councils who still admit Freemen, and concluded that there are no hard and fast rules as to the grounds for nomination, with the award being made to whomever it sees fit.

8.5 The consideration of setting some criteria against which nominations may be judged 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. In correspondence with Mr Martin, he raised the point that whilst honoured to having been put forward for such an award, he did

not, at this time, feel he had done sufficient for the City to warrant its award. It is therefore suggested that this be put on hold until such time as to when Mr Martin feels he is in a better position to be considered for the award.

8.6 As part of the process in drawing up this report, all members of the Council were asked to comment on the appropriateness of the proposed criteria. Five councillors took up this opportunity, two of whom indicated their satisfaction with what being proposed; two suggesting that the previous suggestion of at least 15 years of community service was not significant enough with one suggesting it should be a minimum of 20 years and the other suggesting a minimum of 25 years; one suggesting that a provision be included for the removal of the award if the individual brought the position or Council into disrepute; and one other suggesting that all future Freemanships be given on a life time basis and would not be eligible for passing to future generations.

8.7 Bearing in mind the above comments, the community service qualification has been extended to be a minimum of 20 years.

8.8 The suggestion of the removal of the award is consistent with the approach recently taken for the position of Honorary Alderman, where the following was adopted:-

“It shall be competent for the Council in any other particular case to withdraw the title of Honorary Alderman and the attached rights and privileges. Such withdrawal of the title shall be by way of formal motion to a meeting of the full Council, (the summons to which contains special notice that such withdrawal is proposed and the reason therefore) and subsequent resolution of the Council passed by not less than two thirds of the Members present and voting thereon at the meeting of the Council. On the passing of such resolution, the Corporate Manager, Democratic & Civic Support shall delete the name of the person concerned from the list of Honorary Alderman and advise that person accordingly.”

It is therefore considered appropriate to also include this provision in the criteria.

8.9 Finally, the suggestion as to making the award of the honour similar to that of a life peerage, would be a break from the current convention where anyone who can prove their lineage to a forebear have been awarded such a position, can apply for the position in their own right. This has happened on three occasions in the last 12 years. Whilst accepting that with the possibility of more Freemanships being awarded now if these new criteria are adopted, and therefore there may be a greater call for hereditary Freemanships in the future, it is not felt that these occasions will be any more frequent than in the more recent past.

8.6 It is therefore considered that the following criteria should be established against which future nominations should be 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

8.7 It is felt that these criteria cover all eventualities for nominations. It is further proposed that nominations should be submitted on an application form, together with a citation from the proposer as to why they feel the nominee should be put forward. Any such nominations would be considered by the Corporate Manager, Democratic & Civic Support in conjunction with the Group Leaders, with any nominations then being submitted to the Executive and Council for due consideration.

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
Corporate Manager, Democratic & Civic Support**

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

Contact for enquires:
Democratic Services (Committees)
Room 2.3
01392 265275