

## **REPORT TO EXECUTIVE**

Date of Meeting: 1 December 2020

## **REPORT TO COUNCIL**

Date of Meeting: 15 December 2020

Report of: Corporate Manager, Democratic and Civic Support

Title: Freedom of the City – Gareth Steenson

### **Is this a Key Decision?**

No

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

Council

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

This report sets out a proposal to offer the Freedom of the City to Mr Gareth Steenson for gaining national and international recognition for his rugby playing career with Exeter Chiefs

### **2. Recommendations:**

**RECOMMENDED** to Council that:-

(1) the title of Honorary Freeman of the City Status be conferred on Gareth Steenson;  
and

(2) the Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor be requested to convene an Extraordinary Meeting of the Council to be held on the rising of the Ordinary Meeting on 15 December 2020, for the purpose of passing the appropriate resolution under Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972.

### **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 December 2020, when Members will be asked to consider granting the Freedom of the City to Gareth Steenson.

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; and
- For those who have via a particularly extraordinary act, or series of acts, put the safety or wellbeing of themselves secondary to those of others.

3.5 The following nomination has been received in respect of Gareth Steenson:-

“Gareth Steenson has achieved national and international recognition for his rugby playing career with the Exeter Chiefs, including being a part of the playing squad which saw them gain promotion to the Rugby Premiership, and culminated in the team being crowned double champions in October 2020, by winning both the Heineken Champions Cup (the European club championship) and Gallagher Premiership (the English club championship). This is the first time this has been achieved in the club’s history. He has amassed a club record number of points scored during this career, before his retirement earlier this month. As a key member of the playing squad, Gareth helped put the name of Exeter Chiefs firmly in the mind of all rugby fans, and helped spread the profile of Exeter far and wide.

Exeter Chiefs have had a massive community impact in Exeter and Devon. Since the move to Sandy Park the Club has developed an extensive academy system that is responsible for developing thousands of young people, some of whom have gone to excel at the highest level of sport including the British Lions and national representation. They have brought the Rugby World Cup to Exeter in 2015 and have established Sandy Park as an international venue hosting Women internationals and international 7 tournaments. The venue has grown as the leading conferencing venue in the region supporting hundreds of staff and making a sizable contribution to the economy of the city.

Gareth has been a symbol of this growth in the impact of the club, he has been an ever present presence through this period of growth and accomplishment. For commentators and fans of rugby outside of Exeter, Gareth has been the leader and character behind the team and the personification of the qualities that have made Exeter unique.

The influence has been across at least Europe, in terms of the profile and now success of the Chiefs in European rugby, although this may stretch to a worldwide TV audience. During his career, he has been part of the winning teams for

- Promotion to the English Rugby Premiership
- 2x Premiership titles (English rugby competition)
- 1x Champions Cup (European competition)

- 1x LV=Cup
- 1x Anglo-Welsh Cup
- 2630 points
- 311 appearances for Exeter Chiefs”

3.6 In response to this nomination, Mr Steenson has stated:-

“To receive freedom of the city would be a huge honour. Exeter is my adopted home and the warmth the people of Exeter have shown me over the last 12-13 years has been truly humbling. I have been welcomed into the heart of the Exeter community, which means so much to me. I have been fortunate to be part of an incredible journey at Exeter Chiefs and witnessed first-hand the growth of not just the club but the city and community as a whole. The support I have received both on and off the pitch has been overwhelming. To receive this honour from a city I love would be an incredibly proud moment

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

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

#### **5. Section 151 Officer comments:**

There are no additional financial implications contained within this report.

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

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:**

This report raises no issues for the Monitoring Officer.

#### **8. Report details:**

8.1 The Council is asked to consider bestowing the honour of Freedom of the City to Gareth Steenson

8.2 Members are reminded that the way in which such nominations are considered by the Council was changed at the Executive Committee meeting on 10 April 2018 (minute number 46 refers) whereby an Assessment Panel would sit to consider the written submissions received.

8.3 This Panel was to comprise of:-

- The Leader of the Council (or nominee)
- The Leader(s) of other political groups on the Council (or nominee(s))
- The Chief Executive & Growth Director (or nominee from the Strategic Management Board)
- The Corporate Manager, Democratic & Civic Support
- An external representative (Professor Brian Kirby has taken up this role)

8.4 Due to the current coronavirus pandemic, the Panel considered the nomination via email, and felt satisfied that the necessary criteria had been met to forward the nomination to the Executive for acceptance and onward recommendation to an Extraordinary Council meeting, which, it should be noted, legislation dictates should be convened specifically for this purpose. Statute also dictates that 2/3rds of those attending the Council meeting must vote in favour of the decision.

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

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?**

There are no risks associated with the proposal.

## **11. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)**

In recommending this proposal no potential impact has been identified on people with protected characteristics as determined by the Act because: because the report is for information only.

## **12. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:**

No direct carbon/environmental impacts arising from the recommendations.

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

The Council could decide not to make the award, although it is felt that this would be against the Council's approved criteria.

### **John Street, Corporate Manager Democratic & Civic Support**

Author: John Street, Corporate Manager Democratic & Civic Support

## **Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)**

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None

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