

# EXETER CITY COUNCIL EXECUTIVE

1 JULY 2013

## FREEDOM OF THE CITY FOR THE ROYAL AIR FORCE

### 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Local Government Act 1972 Section 249, gives Local Authorities the power to bestow the Freedom of the City on any military organisations which it feels have an appropriate link with the City.
- 1.2 Members will be aware that at present this honour has been given to The Commando Training Centre, Royal Marines, Lympstone; 243 (The Wessex) Field Hospital (Volunteers); The Rifles; The Coldstream Guards and HMS Defender.
- 1.3 These organisations regularly exercise their Freedom of the City with the most recent being the 243 (The Wessex) Field Hospital who did so on 20<sup>th</sup> April 2013 following its return from a deployment in Afghanistan.

### 2. THE ISSUE

- 2.1 A request has been received from a member of the public to consider the granting of the Freedom of the City to the Royal Air Force to recognise and acknowledge the Force's role in the City and County, particularly during World War Two. A more detailed gazetteer of its involvement in the wider county is attached to this report.
- 2.2 Bearing in mind the organisations which have most recently been bestowed with this honour, and the fact that all aspects of the armed forces with the exception of the RAF, have been honoured, it seems incongruous that the RAF is not included.
- 2.3 However, as the attached appendix shows, there is currently no RAF presence within the City, nor indeed within the County, so an approach was made to the Ministry of Defence to ascertain the best way for this matter to proceed.
- 2.4 In reply, the Minister of State for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans in consultation with the RAF itself, has suggested that RAF Brize Norton would be the most appropriate station to take this forward, and an approach has been made to its Head of Establishment to progress this at the earliest opportunity.
- 2.5 RAF Brize Norton in Oxfordshire is the largest Station in the RAF and has approximately 6000 service personnel and 1400 MOD civil servants and contractors. It is the home of the Air Mobility Squadrons and is the 'gateway to operations', as the main airport used for deploying UK troops Worldwide. It is also the station used for the repatriation of all United Kingdom Servicemen who have been lost in action and is the closest RAF station to Exeter.

### 3. THE PROPOSAL

- 3.1 It is considered appropriate that RAF Brize Norton be bestowed the honour of the Freedom of the City in recognition of the important role that the RAF has and continues to play in military involvement in the City and County.
- 3.2 An appropriate ceremony at which the Freedom of the City would officially be presented to RAF Brize Norton will be arranged as soon as practicably possible. As part of this ceremony, a scroll will be presented, prior to a march through the City by appropriate airmen.
- 3.3 Freedom of the City entitles the RAF to parade through the City on future occasions with "drums beating, colours flying and bayonets fixed."
- 3.4 The RAF will then be added to the organisations who will be invited to participate in Civic events such as Remembrance Sunday and Armed Forces Day, therefore ensuring all aspects of the armed forces are so represented.

#### **4. RECOMMENDATION**

- 4.1.1 That the Lord Mayor be requested to convene an Extraordinary meeting of the Council for the sole purpose of considering the matter of bestowing the honour of the Freedom of the City of Exeter on the Royal Air Force, and in particular RAF Brize Norton .

John Street  
CORPORATE MANAGER, DEMOCRATIC & CIVIC SUPPORT

June 2013.