

Corporate Governance and Standards Committee Report

Ward(s) affected: N/A

Report of the Strategic Services Director

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Review of the Protocol on the appointment, role, status, rights and obligations of Honorary Freemen and Honorary Aldermen

Executive Summary

In 2014, the Council adopted a Protocol on the appointment, role, status, rights and obligations of Honorary Freemen and Honorary Aldermen (see Appendix 1).

The Committee will recall that the Council at its meeting held on 28 July considered the nominations of five former councillors, who had given eminent service to the Council, for appointment as Honorary Aldermen, and agreed to convene a special meeting of the Council for the purpose of conferring upon them the title of Honorary Alderman on Thursday 2 December 2021 at 7pm at the Guildhall.

At the Council meeting, the Leader of the Council reiterated a comment he had made previously regarding the need for the Council to review the Protocol, particularly in relation to the requirement that Honorary Freemen and Aldermen refrain from making public statements which are critical of the Council. The Corporate Governance Task Group was asked to review the Protocol to enable any amendments to be approved by full Council before the Council meets formally on 2 December to confer the title of Honorary Alderman on the five nominees.

The Task Group is scheduled to meet on Monday 20 September and their recommendations will be reported to the Committee for consideration at its meeting.

Recommendation to Committee

The Committee is asked to review the Protocol, taking into consideration the recommendations of the Corporate Governance Task Group following its meeting on 20 September 2021, and submit recommendations as appropriate to full Council on 5 October 2021.

Reason for Recommendation:

To bring the Protocol up to date, including for the purpose of clarifying the rights and obligations placed upon Honorary Freemen and Honorary Aldermen.

Is the report (or part of it) exempt from publication? No

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide the Committee with the findings and recommendations of the Corporate Governance Task Group in respect of the review of the Protocol on the appointment, role, status, rights and obligations of Honorary Freemen and Honorary Aldermen.

2. Strategic Priorities

- 2.1 The review of the Protocol is consistent with the Council's desire to be open and accountable, and delivering improvements and enabling change.

3. Background

- 3.1 Under Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council may, by a resolution passed by not less than two-thirds of the members voting at a meeting of the Council specially convened for that purpose:

- (a) admit to be Honorary Freemen of the Borough to those persons of distinction (including organisations) who have, in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent services to the borough; and
- (b) confer the title of Honorary Aldermen on persons who have, in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent services to it as past members

- 3.2 The current list of Honorary Freemen (including Honorary Freedoms in respect of organisations), and Honorary Aldermen is attached as Appendix 2 to this report.

- 3.3 Prior to 2014, it was acknowledged that the Council had, over the years, admitted as Honorary Freemen a very small number of persons and bestowed the title of Honorary Alderman on a small number of former councillors, but the question as to what constituted "eminent services" had never been defined. The introduction of the Protocol (see Appendix 1) clarified the criteria for the appointment of both honorary freemen and aldermen and to define their respective roles, status, rights and obligations.

- 3.4 The Committee will recall that the Council at its meeting held on 28 July considered the nominations of five former councillors, who had given eminent service to the Council, for appointment as Honorary Aldermen, and agreed to convene a special meeting of the Council for the purpose of conferring upon them the title of Honorary Alderman on Thursday 2 December 2021 at 7pm at the Guildhall.

- 3.5 At the Council meeting, the Leader of the Council reiterated a comment he had made previously regarding the need for the Council to review the Protocol, particularly in relation to the requirement that Honorary Freemen and Aldermen refrain from making public statements which are critical of the Council. The Corporate Governance Task Group¹ was asked to review the Protocol to enable any amendments to be approved by full Council before the Council meets formally on 2 December to confer the title of Honorary Alderman on the five nominees.
- 3.6 The Task Group is scheduled to meet on Monday 20 September and their recommendations will be reported to the Committee for consideration at its meeting.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 No financial implications apply.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 These are stated on paragraph 3.1 above.

6. Human Resource Implications

- 6.1 No human resource implications apply.

7. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 7.1 Public authorities are required to have due regard to the aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010) when making decisions and setting policies. This duty has been considered in the context of this report and it has been concluded that there are no equality and diversity implications arising directly from this report.

8. Climate Change/Sustainability Implications

- 8.1 No Climate Change or sustainability implications apply.

9. Summary of Options

- 9.1 The Committee may decide to make recommendations to Council to amend the Protocol in accordance with any recommendations submitted by the Task Group, or such other amendments as the Committee deems fit, or to make no recommendations to amend the Protocol.

10. Conclusion

- 10.1 The Protocol has not been reviewed since it was introduced in 2014. This review will provide an opportunity to bring the Protocol up to date and address any perceived anomalies or inconsistencies.

¹ The Task Group currently comprises Councillors Deborah Seabrook (Chairman), Will Salmon, Nigel Manning, Ramsey Nagaty, and James Walsh, together with Julia Osborn and Murray Litvak (Parish Council Representative and Independent Member respectively on this Committee)

11. Background Papers

None

12. Appendices

Appendix 1: Adopted Protocol

Appendix 2: "Honorary freemen, aldermen and officers" – extract from GBC website