

Council 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.

Attached as Appendix 1 to this report is an extract from the Council's website entitled "Honorary freemen, aldermen and officers", which sets out the history of these honorary appointments and also lists currently appointed Honorary Freemen and Aldermen.

Councillors 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, at this meeting, before the Council meets formally on 2 December to confer the title of Honorary Alderman on the five nominees.

The Task Group met on 20 September 2021 and made a number of suggested changes to the Protocol, which were considered by the Corporate Governance & Standards Committee at its meeting on 23 September 2021.

The Committee agreed with the Task Group's suggested changes and has recommended that the Council adopts the revised Protocol, which is set out as Appendix 2 to this report.

## **Recommendation to Council**

That the revised Protocol on the appointment, role, status, rights and obligations of Honorary Freemen and Honorary Aldermen, as set out in Appendix 2 to this report, be adopted.

### 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 Council with the findings and recommendations of the Corporate Governance Task Group and Corporate Governance and Standards Committee 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 included in Appendix 1 to this report. Appendix 1 is an extract from the Council's website entitled "Honorary freemen, aldermen and officers", which also sets out the history of these honorary appointments.

- 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 clarified the criteria for the appointment of both honorary freemen and aldermen and to define their respective roles, status, rights and obligations.

- 3.4 Councillors will recall that the Council at its last 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 that 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<sup>1</sup> was asked to review the Protocol to enable any amendments to be approved by full Council, at this meeting, before the Council meets formally on 2 December to confer the title of Honorary Alderman on the five nominees.
- 3.6 The Task Group met on 20 September 2021 and made a number of suggested changes to the Protocol, which were considered by the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee at its meeting on 23 September 2021.
- 3.7 The Committee agreed with the Task Group's suggested changes and has recommended that the Council adopts the revised Protocol, which is set out as Appendix 2 to this report.

#### **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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 the Corporate Governance & Standards Committee)

**9. Summary of Options**

- 9.1 The Council may decide to adopt the revised Protocol, to make further amendments to the Protocol, or to make no changes to the Protocol.

**10. Conclusion**

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

**11. Background Papers**

None

**12. Appendices**

Appendix 1: "Honorary freemen, aldermen and officers" – extract from GBC website  
Appendix 2: Proposed revised Protocol on the appointment, role, status, rights and obligations of Honorary Freemen and Honorary Aldermen