

Executive Report

Ward(s) affected: All

Report of Strategic Services Director

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City Status

Executive Summary

As part of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations, there is a civic honours competition for city status. Any local authority that considers its area deserves to be granted city status is able to enter. This report seeks approval for Guildford to submit a bid.

Recommendation to Executive

That the Director of Strategic Services, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, be authorised to submit a bid for city status for the borough of Guildford as part of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations.

Reason for Recommendation:

To authorise the submission of a bid for city status.

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

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The report seeks authority for a bid to be submitted for the borough of Guildford to be conferred with city status to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

2. Strategic Priorities

- 2.1 We believe that achieving city status would contribute to the priority in our new draft Corporate Plan of supporting our business community and attracting new inward investment.

3. Background

- 3.1 City status has historically been granted by the Sovereign to mark special royal and other occasions on the advice of the government. Since 1992, city status has been gained through an official competition. The first competition, which Sunderland won, was to mark the fortieth anniversary of the Queen's reign. In 2000, Brighton and Hove, Wolverhampton and Inverness were granted city status, followed in 2002 by Preston, Newport, Stirling, Lisburn and Newry. Chelmsford, Perth and St Asaph were the latest to gain city status to mark the Queen's Golden Jubilee in 2012. Guildford entered the competitions in 2000 and 2002.
- 3.2 The Queen will be the first British monarch to have reached 70 years on the throne in 2022. The Platinum Jubilee celebrations will reflect on her reign and her impact on the UK and the world since 1952. As part of these celebrations, there will be a civic honours competition for city status. Any local authority that considers its area deserves to be granted city status is able to enter. The deadline for submissions is 8 December 2021.
- 3.3 From past experience, it appears that one or two English towns might expect to receive city status at any one time. Looking at previous competitions, it is possible criteria for English towns might have included population, strong royal, church or historical associations and evidence of regional status with a distinct identity.
- 3.4 Although no feedback is given, successful applicants suggest substantial community support for bids is crucial. Therefore, any bid would be strengthened by wide support across the political spectrum and from MPs, partners, institutions, businesses and residents.
- 3.5 Although there are no royal or government privileges, we believe that city status brings greater status and prestige on the national and international stage and can act as a catalyst for future success. It can also stimulate inward investment and new business opportunities which drives economic prosperity. City status would provide an opportunity to showcase, celebrate and gain recognition for local achievements and unique heritage, attractions, people and places and encourage tourism in the area.
- 3.6 Guildford is the county town for Surrey and is a centre for heritage, culture and sport. We have a world class university and excellent schools. Our vibrant local economy is home to many businesses at the forefront of cutting-edge technologies and is a significant contributor to the UK economy. Given our distinct historic and cultural identity, rich history and modern, outward looking focus, we feel that our borough is an excellent candidate for city status.
- 3.7 In addition, our communities (both residents and businesses) have come together in extraordinary ways to support those most in need during the current pandemic. We believe that city status would boost civic pride and create an even greater sense of collective ownership of our borough. It would celebrate the community spirit we have shown and be a wonderful recognition of our borough.

4. Consultations

- 4.1 We are keen to show wide community support for our bid for city status. The Leader of the Council has written to partner organisations, civic dignitaries, key businesses, community groups and many others asking them to consider supporting our bid. A list of supporters to date is attached as Appendix 1.
- 4.2 We have also been asking residents to show their support through a “Back Our Bid” campaign and will continue to do so until the deadline for submissions on 8 December 2021.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 Some councils have incurred considerable expense in submitting bids for city status in previous competitions. For the current competition, the government is emphasising that they do not wish to see undue expense and is, therefore, requiring submissions by way of a standard application form (rather than glossy brochures).
- 5.2 An in-house officer team will lead on our application and any associated activities. As such, the bid will be prepared with minimal cost and any expenditure will be met from within existing budgets. We have also already received a number of offers from partners and businesses to assist with the bid.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report. City status would not bring any changes to the Council’s statutory powers, responsibilities or duties. There would also be no constitutional implications for parish councils within the borough. However, it should be noted that, if city status is granted to the borough and we later merge with another Council, it is possible for city status to be lost if the correct procedures are not followed.

7. Human Resource Implications

- 7.1 There are no human resources implications arising from this report other than the officer time in preparing our bid.

8. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 8.1 There are no equality or diversity implications arising from this report.

9. Climate Change/Sustainability Implications

- 9.1 There are no climate change or sustainability implications arising from this report.

10. Summary of Options

- 10.1 The options are whether we should submit a bid for city status or not.

11. Conclusion

- 11.1 We believe that city status brings significant benefits in terms of reputation and prestige, inward investment and new business opportunities, tourism and civic pride. Therefore, we believe that a bid for city status for the borough of Guildford should be made to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

12. Background Papers

None

13. Appendices

Appendix 1: List of City Status Supporters