

Committee: Council

Date: 2 April 2014

Wards: All

Subject: Freedom of the Borough – Proposed Criteria and Procedures

Lead officer: Paul Evans, Assistant Director of Corporate Governance

Lead member: Councillor Stephen Alambritis, Leader of the Council

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Recommendation:

That Council agree to the adoption of criteria and procedures recommended by the General Purposes Committee in relation to nominations for the award of the freedom of the borough. The proposed criteria are set out in paragraphs 2.5 to 2.8 and proposed procedures are set out in paragraphs 2.10 to 2.14 of this report.

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. At its meeting on 20 November 2013, Council resolved that officers be instructed to report to the General Purposes Committee on future criteria and procedures for considering nominees for the freedom of the borough with a view to Council receiving a recommendation from General Purposes Committee on the adoption of such criteria and procedures.
- 1.2. The General Purposes Committee established a small working group comprising five members of General Purposes Committee, the Head of Democracy Services, the Leisure and Culture Development Manager and the Head of Communications for the purpose of developing criteria and reporting back to the Committee.
- 1.3. The working group considered the criteria and procedures adopted by other councils, identified a set of guiding principles for Merton and agreed draft criteria and procedures to recommend to General Purposes Committee.
- 1.4. General Purposes Committee discussed these at its meeting on 12 March 2014 and agreed to forward them to Council. This report sets out the proposed criteria and procedures for the consideration of Council.

2 DETAILS

Principles

- 2.1. General Purposes Committee noted that awards prior to 2013 had been to politicians who had made a substantial contribution to the civic life of the borough. Members agreed that they wished to develop criteria that would acknowledge significant contribution made to other aspects of the borough and those who have brought distinction to the borough.

- 2.2. Members wished to be able to acknowledge sustained commitment but stressed that it would be awarded for exceptional service and not automatically for long service.
- 2.3. General Purposes Committee has sought to ensure that there is a process in place that can be activated when there is a nomination, but that wouldn't create the expectation that nominees would automatically receive the freedom of the borough – members stressed that it is important that the award doesn't become commonplace.

Criteria

- 2.4. General Purposes Committee agreed to recommend the following criteria to Council:
- 2.5. Freedom of the Borough is a high honour which should only be awarded in exceptional circumstances where the prospective recipient is an individual or organisation of distinction and has rendered eminent services to the borough.
- 2.6. Candidates should have a strong and continuing connection with and commitment to Merton or have made a major contribution to national life and in doing so have enhanced the reputation of the borough.
- 2.7. Candidates should have made a substantial contribution to the borough in any area of activity, which could include:
- artistic and cultural endeavours
 - business, economic growth and prosperity
 - charitable work
 - improvement to the built and natural environment
 - religious and spiritual life
 - sports activities
 - civic service
- 2.8. The award may be granted posthumously.

Procedures

- 2.9. General Purposes Committee agreed to recommend the following procedure to Council:
- 2.10. Nominations for persons or organisations to be granted Freedom of the Borough, may be made by any serving Member of the Council to the Monitoring Officer on the appropriate form. The Member should first raise the matter for discussion within their political group.
- 2.11. Once a nomination is received, the Monitoring Officer will check that sufficient information has been provided on the form and will pass it to the General Purposes Committee for consideration.

- 2.12. The Monitoring Officer will write to all councillors at least once during the four yearly municipal cycle, preferably at or near the midpoint, to draw their attention to the opportunity to make nominations
- 2.13. The General Purposes Committee may establish a small working group to informally assess nominations and the likelihood of meeting the 2/3 criteria. The working group would report back to the General Purposes Committee in regard to any nominee who it believed would meet the criteria and achieve sufficient support at Council.
- 2.14. General Purposes Committee shall report to Council and, should Council accept the nomination, a Special Meeting of Council would then be called to pass the resolution as required by Section 248 of the Local Government Act 1972.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. Council may choose to agree alternative criteria and/or procedures.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. A request for information on criteria and procedures was placed on the Association of Democratic Services Officers' website. Information was received from three councils and was considered by the working group.

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1. The criteria and procedures agreed by Council will be implemented with immediate effect.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

Any expenditure associated with conferring the Honorary Freedom of the Borough will be from existing budgets.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. Section 249 (paragraphs 5 and 6) of the Local Government Act 1972 states:
 - (i) (5) The Council of a London Borough... may, by resolution passed by not less than two-thirds of the members voting thereon at a meeting of the council specially convened for the purpose with notice of the object, admit to the borough persons of distinction and persons who have, in the opinion of the council, rendered eminent services to the borough"
 - (ii) (6) The Council of a London Borough...may spend such reasonable sum as they think fit for the presenting an address or a casket containing an address to a person upon whom they have conferred the title of (honorary alderman) or admitted to be an honorary freeman of the ...borough..

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. None.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. None.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1. None

11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

None

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

Note of meeting of the Freedom of the Borough Working Group, 6 February 2014

Report to General Purposes Committee, 12 March 2014