

## **Committee: Standards and General Purposes**

**Date: 21 July 2022**

Wards: All

## **Subject: Freedom of the Borough**

Lead officer: Louise Round, Managing Director, South London Legal Partnership

Lead member: Councillor Eleanor Stringer, Cabinet Member for Civic Pride

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### **Recommendations:**

- A. To agree the nomination of Ex-Councillor Mark Allison for Freeperson of the Borough Status.
  
  - B. To note that a special Council meeting will be held on 5 September to confer that status on Ex-Councillor Allison and Ex-Councillor Williams and to awarded honorary alderman status on the ex-councillors listed in paragraph 2.1.5 below.
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## **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1. Members will be aware that the Council has the power under section 249 of the Local Government act to admit “persons of distinction” as freemen or freewomen of the Borough. A similar power exists to confer the title of honorary aldermen and alderwomen on persons who in the opinion of the Council have rendered eminent services to the council while members of the Council.

## **2 DETAILS**

- 2.1.1 This Committee has previously agreed that in order to award freedom of the borough status nominations should be sent to the Monitoring Officer and this Committee may then convene a cross party working group for the purpose of considering such nominations.
- 2.1.2 This Committee has previously agreed the nomination of ex-councillor David Williams for freeperson status. In that instance agreement was reached without the need for a cross party working party. Since that nomination was agreed, a further nomination has been received in respect of ex councillor Allison and a copy of that nomination is attached as appendix A. Discussions have taken place with the group leaders and it is understood that a consensus has been reached that ex councillor Allison’s nomination is also agreed.
- 2.1.3 It is therefore proposed that the special meeting take place on 5 September for the purposes of conferring freeperson status on both ex councillors. At that meeting Council will also be invited to confer honorary alderman and woman status on the ex councillors listed below.
- 2.1.4 Under the Local Government Act 1972, Honorary Alderman and woman status can be conferred on persons who have, in the opinion of the Council.

Rendered eminent services to the Council as past members of that Council, but who are not then members of the Council. The practice in Merton is that all Councillors who have 15 or more years cumulative service will be automatically given Honorary Alderman or woman status once they are no longer Councillors.

2.1.5 It is therefore recommended that the following ten Ex-Councillors who have 15 or more years of cumulative service on the Council are conferred with this status:

- Geraldine Stanford
- Nick Draper
- Russell Makin
- David Chung
- Oonagh Moulton
- David Simpson CBE
- Peter Southgate
- John Dehaney
- David Dean
- James Holmes

### **3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

3.1. Members could choose not to agree the nomination for freeperson status at this time.

### **4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED**

4.1. In relation to conferring freedom of the borough status, all councillors have been invited to make nominations and the final decision will rest with full Council. There is no requirement for public consultation.

### **5 TIMETABLE**

5.1. If the Committee agrees the proposals set out in this report, a Special Council on 5 September to confer freedom of the borough status along with the previously agreed award for David Williams and honorary alderman and woman status on a number of other ex-councillors.

### **6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS**

6.1. There are no significant implications although a modest amount of expenditure will be required to hold the special council referred to above.

### **7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

7.1. The power to confer freedom of the borough and honorary alderman status is contained in section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972 and includes the ability to incur reasonable expenditure in connection with the same. In order to confer such status, it is necessary for a resolution to be passed by a two thirds majority at a special council meeting convened for that purpose, as will be the case in respect of the meeting on 5 September.

- 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 BACKGROUND PAPERS**
- 11.1. None.

**NOMINATION FOR FREEDOM OF THE BOROUGH**

1. Name of the person or organisation being nominated for Freedom of the Borough.

MARK ALLISON

2. 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.

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.

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

The award may be granted posthumously.

3. The award of the Freedom of the Borough requires support of 2/3 of Council. Nominations should therefore first be discussed within your political group and, where appropriate, with other group leaders. In your opinion, is the nomination likely to achieve the required 2/3 support at Council?

YES

NO

4. Please use the box below to outline your nominee's outstanding achievements in the Borough or on the international stage which have brought pride and satisfaction to the Borough. Continue on a separate sheet if necessary.

Mark Allison has made a major contribution to the borough ever since he was elected as a councillor in 2002. Mark has held many positions on the council. While on these he made a substantial contribution to the borough especially in enhancing businesses, economic growth and prosperity in the borough and in protecting those more vulnerable and on low incomes and supporting charities in the Borough.

**Executive Positions on the Council:**

2002 – 2003 Cabinet Member for Special Projects

2003 – 2006 Cabinet Member for Customer Services

2010 - 2014 Cabinet Member for Finance

2014 – 2020 Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

2020 – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment

2021 – Leader

**Committees/Forums/External Bodies:**

2006 –OSC (substitute); The Way We Work OSP, Better Healthcare Closer To Home, Staff Consultative Committee,

2007 – OSC, Regeneration and the Public Realm OSP

2008 – Merton Sutton Surrey JHSC

2009 – Merton Sutton Surrey JHSC

2010 – Pension Fund Advisory Committee, Greater London Employment Forum, London Council Transport and Environment Committee,

2011 – Pension Fund Advisory Committee, Greater London Employment Forum,

2012 – Pension Fund Advisory Committee, Greater London Employment Forum, London Councils Transport and Environment Committee

2013 – Pension Fund Advisory Committee, Greater London Employment Forum,

2014 – Appointments Committee (Vice Chair), Appeals Committee, Pension Fund Advisory Committee, Greater London Employment Forum

2015 – Appointments Committee (Vice Chair), Appeals Committee, Pension Fund Advisory Committee, Greater London Employment Forum

2016 – Appointments Committee (Vice Chair), Appeals Committee, Pension Fund Advisory Committee, Greater London Employment Forum

2017 – Appointments Committee (Vice Chair), Appeals Committee, Pension Fund Advisory Committee, Greater London Employment Forum

2018 – Appointments Committee (Vice Chair), Appeals Committee, Pension Fund Investment Advisory Panel, Greater London Employment Forum

2019 – Appointments Committee, Pension Fund Investment Advisory Panel, Greater London Employment Forum

2020 – Appointments Committee, Joint Regulatory Services Committee, Pension Fund Investment Advisory Committee, Greater London Employment Forum

2021 – Appointments Committee (Chair), Appeals Committee (Chair), Joint Regulatory Services Committee, Newable Ltd, LGIU, London Councils Leaders' Committee

## **A substantial contribution to the borough**

As a councillor, be it on a committee, in the Cabinet as Finance Lead, as Deputy Leader and as the Leader, Mark led on, contributed to and achieved the following for the 200,000+ residents of Merton living in 80,000+ households, served by over 8,000+ businesses:

Protected residents from the cost of living crisis by keeping Council Tax low: Maintained one of Britain's most generous council tax rebate schemes; Protected services for the most vulnerable, through a funding ratio ensuring budget cuts are lower for children's services and adult social care; Announced a climate emergency, established a climate action plan and put in place a fossil fuel divestment process for Merton's pension fund; Planted more trees and launched the borough's first ever tree strategy; Maintained good quality universal services, with high satisfaction for parks and green spaces; Invested in young people with special educational needs and disabilities; Massively improved education results, with Merton's state school pupils in the country's top five for progress rates, and 95% of our schools rated Good and Outstanding; Reinstated free school meals after the government scrapped them; Delivered food to isolating older and vulnerable residents during lockdown; Kept residents safe throughout the pandemic, helped care homes to reduce virus rates and ensured patients leaving hospital got support fast; Distributed Covid-19 grants to 4,000 struggling households during the pandemic, and gave financial support to foodbanks and other local charities; Been among the fastest councils to get financial support to local businesses; Approved thousands of social and affordable homes – including the regeneration of High Path; Taken action against rogue landlords, including fines and court cases; Supported sport and brought AFC Wimbledon home again after 30 years in the wilderness – and attracted the London Broncos to Plough Lane too; Prevented library closures, and built a new library at Colliers Wood; Opened a new leisure centre and swimming pool at Morden; Introduced wheeled bins that have reduced the level of split bag litter and resulted in record recycling rates; Issued more fines to people who leave litter or fly-tipping than any other council in the country; Introduced [Fix My Street](#) to make it easier to report rubbish on the street, with 95% of fly-tips now being removed within 24 hours of a report; Invested in modern CCTV to keep our residents safe and reduce the fear of crime; Reduced crime, with Merton now among the lowest crime boroughs in London; Ensured all staff are paid the living wage, and introduced bereavement leave for staff who miscarry.