

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

**Date: 19 July 2023**

### **Subject: Recommendations from the Working Group – Freedom of the Borough & Honorary Alderpersons Status**

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

Lead member: Councillor Martin Whelton, Chair, Standards and General Purposes Committee

Contact officer: Amy Dumitrescu, Democracy Services Manager

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#### **Recommendations:**

A. That the Standards and General Purposes Committee consider the report of the working group and agree whether to implement any or all of their recommendations, namely:

i) to continue the existing process of establishing a working group of this committee to consider nominations for freedom of the borough status, save in respect of ex Leaders of the Council being considered for such status in accordance with recommendation (vi) below;

ii) to publicise the process and criteria for awarding freedom of the borough status more widely;

iii) to reduce the length of time for which a retiring member has served as a councillor prior to becoming eligible for honorary alderperson status from 15 to 10 cumulative years;

iv) to establish a working group of this committee to consider nominations for honorary alderperson status following local elections and as necessary and to ask that working group to take into account any findings made by a hearings subcommittee in respect of an individual councillor in making any recommendations relating to that person;

v) to allow honorary alderperson status to be awarded to councillors who have provided exceptional service even where they do not have 10 cumulative years' service prior to retiring, such nominations to be considered by the working group referred to at (iv) above committee;

vi) to agree that in future retiring councillors who have at some time served a minimum of four years as Leader of the Council should be awarded freedom of the borough status, subject always to the agreement of two thirds of councillors present at a special meeting of full Council convened for that purpose.

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- B. That the Standards and General Purposes Committee consider whether to recommend to Council the nomination of former Councillor Janice Howard for Honorary Alderwoman status as detailed in paragraph 2.16 below
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## **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1.1. The Standards and General Purposes Committee at its meeting on 27 April 2023 agreed to set up a working group of councillors to consider whether the process for nominating and awarding Honorary Alderperson status should be amended, as well as looking at the process for nominating persons for Freedom of the Borough status and whether this status should be automatically awarded to those who had been Leader of the Council.

## **2 DETAILS**

2.1. The working group met on 21 June 2023. The working group consisted of Councillors Akyigyina, Cooper-Marbiah, Macauley, Foley, and Wilson. Councillor Paterson also communicated his agreement on the recommendations following the meeting having been unable to attend the meeting of the working group.

2.2. The recommendations of this working group are detailed below. The Standards and General Purposes Committee are asked to consider these and agree whether to implement any or all of the recommendations.

### 2.3. Recommendation 1 – Freedom of the Borough Publicity

2.4. The working group expressed concern that there were a number of deserving persons within the Borough who they were aware of, who perhaps also should have been put forward for the honour of Freedom of the Borough. The working group felt that whilst the criteria for Freedom of the Borough still needed to be made clear and each nomination received should be assessed and discussed by the Committee or a working group thereof, that the ability for persons to be nominated for this honour should be more well publicised.

### 2.5. Recommendation 2 – Honorary Alderperson Criteria & Award

2.6. The working group looked at the current process for receiving Honorary Alderperson status. The current working practice in Merton is to automatically award the status to all Councillors who have at least 15 years cumulative service when they leave the Council (either by not standing for re-election or by losing their seat).

2.7. The working group received evidence of how other Boroughs award this status. It was noted that the neighbouring Boroughs of Kingston and Wandsworth both awarded Honorary Alderperson status to Councillors with at least 10 years cumulative service. Kingston also automatically provided Honorary Alderperson status to any Councillor who had been Mayor. Richmond does not award Honorary Alderperson status to any councillors, but presents all Councillors regardless of service with a certificate when they have left the Council, as well as presenting them with a plaque or planting a tree in recognition of their service.

2.8. The working group agreed that their view was the current working practice of 15 years cumulative service was too lengthy and should be reduced in line with neighbouring Boroughs to 10 years or more cumulative service. The working group also supported the proposal of planting a tree in their ward for those eligible for that status as well as in memory of any Councillor who died during service. This would be alongside the current system of providing framed certificates to Councillors at a

Special Council meeting and their name being written on the appropriate honours board within the Council Chamber.

2.9. Recommendation 3 – Automatic Award of the Status to Mayors

2.10. The Working group agreed to recommend that any Councillor who had served as Mayor during their time in office, regardless of any other length of service, would be eligible for Honorary Alderperson status.

2.11. Recommendation 4 – Honorary Alderperson Status

2.12. Within the report (Appendix A) considered by the Standards and General Purposes Committee meeting on 27 April 2023, 4 options were proposed to the working group to consider. The working group felt that there should be provision to nominate those who had not reached the required threshold for the status in terms of service if there were exceptional reasons for nominating them. Their decision was therefore to propose an amended version of option 4 as follows:

2.13. “That any Councillor (including those with less than 10 cumulative years’ service) who is resigning/loses their seat at an election can be nominated or Honorary Alderman/woman status, provided there is a case made for this and this is agreed by either the Standards and General Purposes Committee or a working group thereof.”

2.14. The working group agreed that in considering the above, information about any complaints against those Councillors which had been upheld and through the hearings process (and therefore would be serious in nature) should be considered as part of the decision of the Committee or working group whether to award the status to those Councillors.

2.15. Recommendation 5 – To award Honorary Alderwoman Status to Janice Howard

2.16. During the course of discussions, the working group cited Janice Howard as an exceptional individual, who having lost her seat in May 2022 had not served the required 15 years cumulative service to qualify for Honorary Alderwoman Status.

2.17. The working group recognised her exceptional fund raising achievements , noting that she had raised almost £100,000 for her mayoral charities and continued to be regularly involved with Mayoral Events committees during 2022-23. The working group therefore recommended that Janice Howard should be nominated to receive Honorary Alderwoman status. If the Standards and General Purposes Committee agreed this recommendation to award honorary alderperson status to Janice Howard, a special Council meeting would need to be convened for this purpose, likely in Autumn 2023.

2.18. Recommendation 6 – Freedom of the Borough for Leaders of the Council

2.19. The working group considered whether Councillors who had served as Leader of the Council should be automatically granted Freedom of the Borough status when they left the Council. The working group felt that this should be the case, however Leaders should have served a minimum amount of time as Leader to qualify for this. The working group recommended therefore that all Councillors who had served as Leader of the Council for at least a full term, that being 4 years, would automatically be awarded Freedom of the Borough.

2.20. Recommendation 7 – Retrospective awards of Freedom of the Borough to Former Leaders of the Council

2.21. If Recommendation 6 is approved by the Standards and General Purposes Committee, the working group did not wish to retrospectively apply this to former leaders. Therefore, if approved, only those leaving the Council from 2023 onwards and eligible under the proposed criteria would be awarded freedom of the borough.

### **3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

3.1. The Committee could decide not to adopt the recommendations by the working group or to amend them

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

4.1. All political groups within the Council were represented on the working group

### **5 TIMETABLE**

5.1. Any of the recommendations approved by the Standards and General Purposes Committee would take immediate effect.

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

6.1. The cost of signwriting and providing certificates to those awarded Freedom of the Borough of Honorary Alderperson status, as well as the costs associated with the Special Council meetings can be met within existing budgets.

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

7.1. The Council has the power to nominate persons and honorary alderperson status pursuant to section 249(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 if it is satisfied that they have rendered eminent service to the council as past members and who are no longer members. S.249(5) allows freedom of the borough status to be conferred on persons of distinction or persons who have provided eminent service to the place or area. Both require a special meeting and a two thirds majority of those present to vote in favour. Therefore although it is permissible for there to be a presumption that ex Leaders of the Council to be awarded freeperson status, the Council cannot fetter its discretion and will retain the right to decide on a case by case basis.

### **8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS**

8.1. None for the purposes of this report

### **9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

9.1. None for the purposes of this report

### **10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

10.1. None for the purposes of this report

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

- Appendix A – Report considered by the working group as agreed by the Standards and General Purposes Committee on 27 April 2023

### **12 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

12.1. None



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