

Charter Trustees for the City of Durham

11 December 2024

Honorary Freedom Arrangements



City of Durham

Report of James Etherington, Clerk to the Charter Trustees

Purpose of the Report

1. To request Charter Trustees approval of arrangements for dealing certain honorary appointments.

Background

2. The Charter Trustees, by virtue of section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972, have the power to bestow the honorary freedom of the city¹ upon “persons of distinction” and “persons who have, in the opinion of the authority, rendered eminent services to that place or area.”
3. The honorary freedom of the city is the “highest honour that [the Charter Trustees] can bestow and, in the view of many, should not be given too often.”² It can only be granted at a special meeting of the Charter Trust and must be approved by at least two thirds of those members present.
4. Whilst the honour is the highest that can be awarded, it is (as the name suggests) entirely honorary and comes with no responsibility or privileges. Honorary Freeman/Freewomen are invited to attend Charter Trust events as guests.
5. In addition, whilst there is no prohibition on former councillors being awarded this honour (and indeed, the award has been bestowed upon former councillors in the past), there is another honorary award which they are potentially entitled to.

¹ This honour should not be confused with being admitted as a Freeman to one of the City’s trade guilds.

² Willward P, *Civic Ceremonial: A Handbook, History and Guide for Mayors, Councillors and Officers* (5th edn, Shaw & Sons 2007), p167

6. Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972 also allows for the creation of honorary aldermen and alderwomen. This honour is bestowed by the County Council to “persons who have, in the opinion of the council, rendered eminent services to the council...” Charter Trustees may note the similarity in the wording between this test and the test above.
7. Currently the County Council consider the “threshold” for eminent service to be 16 years of membership of the County Council or of the former District Councils.
8. Associated with this power, is the ability to grant the freedom of entry to service units which have rendered conspicuous service and which are closely associated with the city.
9. This honour does have practical significance and allows the service unit to march through the streets of the city with bayonets fixed, drums beating and Colours flying.
10. Currently, the Charter Trust does not have an agreed process for dealing with those who are put forward for consideration for honours and it is proposed, to avoid inconsistencies in the future, that a process be now adopted.
11. It is therefore proposed that the initial consideration of any applications for an honorary award, whether from the person/organisation themselves or someone on their behalf, be delegated to the Clerk, in consultation with the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor.
12. Where persons are considered by the panel to be either a “person of distinction” or a “person [who has]...rendered eminent services” to the City of Durham, the clerk shall make enquiries to ensure that the award is likely to be accepted and to make arrangements for a special meeting of the Charter Trust to be arranged in accordance with s249(8) of the Local Government Act 1972.
13. Similar arrangements are proposed in relation to those service units who are deemed to have rendered conspicuous service and are closely associated with the City.
14. The proposed arrangements are based on arrangements which have been implemented in other cities such as Newcastle and Liverpool.

Recommendation

15. That the Clerk be delegated powers, in consultation with the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, to consider nominations for honorary freedoms.

Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications – As outline in the report.

Finance – None specific within this report.

Consultation - None specific within the report.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty - None specific within the report.

Climate Change - None specific within the report.

Human Rights - None specific within the report.

Crime and Disorder - None specific within the report.

Staffing - None specific within the report.

Accommodation - None specific within the report.

Risk – None specific within this report.

Procurement - None specific within the report.