

Freedom of the Borough - Protocol

Background

The medieval term 'freeman' traditionally meant someone who was not the property of a feudal lord, but enjoyed privileges such as the right to earn money and own land. Town dwellers who were protected by the charter of their town or city were often free - hence the term 'freedom of the city'.

The conferment of the Honorary Freedom of a borough or city has been established since 1885 as the highest honour which the local authority can bestow. Historically, it had not always been treated with such reverence. Until the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 put an end to the practice, it had been possible to appoint honorary freemen for less noble reasons, not least of which might have been the future disposition of their vote at elections.

To be granted the title of Honorary Freeman is a mark of distinction upon the person whom the Council wishes to honour. The Freedom itself carries no privilege and is purely an honour, reflecting the eminence of the person on whom it is conferred or as recognition of significant and valuable services rendered to the city or borough by that person. It is normally an honour or award to men or women of note who have lived or worked in the city, and who are proud to be a part of the city's history by becoming freemen or in the case of HM Services Units, Freedom of the Borough.

What criteria is to be used to award this status?

The overriding principle is that these awards should be made on merit, defined as:

- Achievement
- Exceptional Service

Awards should not be for a job well done or because someone has reached a particular level. They should be awarded because an individual has 'gone the extra mile' in the contribution they have made or stand out 'head and shoulders' above others in what has been achieved.

To be considered, the nominee should meet at least 2 of the following criteria:

- delivered in a way that has brought distinction to borough life and enhanced the borough's reputation in the area or activity concerned
- contributed in a way to improve the lives of those less able to help themselves
- demonstrated innovation and entrepreneurship which is delivering results in the borough.

As this is the highest honour that a Borough council can grant it should be used sparingly and should not be given too often in order to preserve its status and value.

The title of Honorary Freeman does not give any rights but it is hoped that person would support the Office of Mayor at civic functions.

The awarding of the Freedom of the Borough to Service Units 'to march through the streets of the borough with bayonets fixed, drums beating and Colours flying' is really an empty grant. The practice has been generally accepted and provides a dignified and satisfactory means of enabling a city or borough to honour a distinguished unit of Her Majesty's forces.

The Process

The recommendation to confer the status of Freeman is made by the Leader, the Deputy Leader and the Mayor, following nomination by any elected member.

For candidates to be considered they must be able to demonstrate a strong and continuing connection with, and commitment to, the Borough or have made a major contribution to national life and in doing so, have enhanced the reputation of the borough.

To assist it is suggested that this could include the following:

- 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

Only in exceptional circumstances should consideration be given to the admission of organisations.

The Procedure

The Democratic Renewal Working Party has agreed the following procedure.

Nominations for persons or organisations to be granted Freedom of the Borough, may be made by any serving Member of the Council to the Head of HR, Legal & Democratic Services on the appropriate form (see Appendix A). Each nomination must contain the support of at least 10 Members of the Council and where appropriate, the member should first raise the matter for discussion within their political group.

The Head of HR, Legal & Democratic Services will check that sufficient information has been provided on the form and will then pass the nomination to the Leader for consideration.

The Leader, Deputy Leader and the Mayor will meet to consider the nomination against the criteria. Following unanimous agreement they will make a recommendation to Council that the honour is bestowed. Alternatively they may decide that the nomination is not suitable as it does not meet the criteria.

The Leader shall report to Council and, should Council accept the nomination, a Special Meeting of Council would then be called to pass the resolution pursuant to Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972, for the admission as Honorary Freemen of the Borough of the relevant persons.

The Ceremony

The ceremony for the admitting of an Honorary Freeman is to be a very formal occasion. Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972 (sub section 5) deals with the admission to the Freedom of the Borough by Borough or City Councils of 'persons of distinction and persons who have in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent services to the Borough'.

The act provides that a special meeting of the Council (made public 5 days prior to the meeting) must be convened with the specific object of passing the resolution to Honorary Freedom - one of the highest honours that the Borough can bestow. This will take place on the same date as the Annual Council meeting when possible.

The resolution should recite the grounds upon which the recommendation is being made, and details of the public services rendered by the recipient should be included. The resolution must be passed by not less than two thirds of the members present.

The procedure should be carried out with the utmost formality and the Honorary Freeman Elect is invited and should attend the Council Meeting and be placed on the right hand of the Lord Mayor.

After the passing of the resolution, the newly admitted Freeman should take the appropriate Freeman's Oath and sign the Freeman's Roll, his/her signature being witnessed by the Mayor and the Chief Executive or nominated Ooficer.

A sealed and illuminated certificate of the grant of Honorary Freedom, containing a copy of the formal resolution, should then be presented to the newly appointed Honorary Freeman by the Lord Mayor with a Freedom of the City medal, with an opportunity being given for the recipient to reply.

After the formal proceedings come to an end, it is usual to close the meeting and adjourn for a reception. This gives an opportunity for the invited guests to offer their congratulations to the newly appointed Honorary Freeman.

APPENDIX A

NOMINATION FORM FOR FREEDOM OF THE BOROUGH.

I Councillor wish to nominate the following person (organisation) to be considered for the status of Freedom of the Borough of St. Edmundsbury Borough Council.

Nominee.....

I am aware that the following criterion needs to be applied to the achievements of the nominee.

They have:

- delivered in a way that has brought distinction to borough life and enhanced the borough’s reputation in the area or activity concerned
- contributed in a way to improve the lives of those less able to help themselves
- demonstrated innovation and entrepreneurship which is delivering results in the borough.

I believe that they have met this criteria in the following way:

We the undersigned Councillors support this nomination for Freedom of the Borough:

1.	6.
2.	7.
3.	8.
4.	9.
5.	10.