

1. Background

1.1 Previously there was no specific legislation or power for a Parish / Town Council to award Honorary Freeman. Advice in regard to honouring of citizens indicated that in the absence of express statutory power, it was considered that local councils could, nevertheless, admit to be honorary citizens of their parishes and communities persons who have served the public well over the years. Any expenditure incurred in connection being funded under the LGA Section 137 power to spend.

1.2 From the 12th January 2010, the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (the 2009 Act) amended the provisions of the LGA 1972 (S.249) to enable all local councils to confer honorary titles.

1.3 By virtue of Section 249(5) and (6) of the 1972 Act as amended, all local councils may now exercise powers to confer the title "Honorary Freeman" or "Honorary Freewoman" to persons of distinction and those who, in the Council's opinion, have rendered eminent services to the Councils area. There is no statutory guidance that sets out any criteria for the appointment of Freeman. As the Freedom of the Parish is awarded in recognition of exceptional service to the Parish, it would be inappropriate to set out strict judging criteria. Instead, guidance on the attributes that successful candidates would be expected to have demonstrated is outlined within this policy.

2. Legal process

2.1 Section 249 (8) of the 1972 Act, as amended, provides that the admission of an Honorary Freeman or Honorary Freewoman must be by resolution made at a meeting of the Full Council specifically convened for such purpose and passed by no less than two-thirds of the members of the Council.

2.2 Section 249 (8) also requires "notice of the object of the meeting" to be given. This confirms the need for the agenda with the public notice and summons to members in respect of the Council meeting to itemise a motion to confer the title of Honorary Freeman or Honorary Freewoman. Section 249 (9) of the 1972 Act as amended provides that a local Council may spend a reasonable sum as it thinks fit for the purpose of presenting a certificate citing the grounds for the award to a person on whom it has been conferred the honorary title.

3. Council Process

3.1 A Town or Parish Council can award a 'Title of Dignity' to a person in recognition of significant contributions being made to the local community. Hevingham Parish Council may award the title of 'Honorary Freeman or Honorary Freewoman of the Parish of Hevingham'. Granting the Freedom of the Parish is the highest honour that the Parish Council can bestow. As this is the highest honour that the Parish Council can grant it should be used sparingly and should not be given too often in order to preserve its status and value.

3.2 In keeping with the special nature of the award it shall be strictly limited to residents from any walk of life who have made an outstanding contribution to Hevingham Parish or a significant national contribution relative to Hevingham Parish so as the nominee's contribution can be demonstrably seen to stand head and shoulders above the contributions made by most other people. The honour should not be awarded simply for meeting certain milestones but in recognition of exceptional contributions. Individuals who have profited from their service would not normally be eligible, however this is subject to the discretion of the Council.

3.3 The Parish Council's decision on the award of the title is final and no discussion or correspondence will be entered into on the matter.

3.4 There is no limit to the number of nominations or holders of the title, but the nature of the nomination criteria means it is unlikely that the honour will be frequently awarded and will therefore remain distinctive. The award will be conferred for the life of the title holder but is not hereditary in nature.

3.5 Nominations must be made by a serving Parish Councillor, although any local resident may approach a Councillor and recommend a nomination. Nominations must be made by a Councillor in writing to the Parish Clerk and explain why in their opinion, the nominee should be considered to be granted the Freedom of the Parish.

3.6 All nominations of Honorary Freeman or Freewoman are to be treated in the strictest of confidence until such time as the nominee approved by the Council has confirmed his or her willingness to accept the honorary title and the appropriate public announcement is made by the Council. The nominee should not be informed that they have been nominated as it is not fair to raise expectations in case they are not met. It is imperative that submissions are not discussed with any other persons outside of the Parish Council. Any disclosure will make the application invalid.

3.7 Once a nomination has been received it will be considered at the next Ordinary Meeting of the Council. This discussion will be held under 'restricted business' and will therefore exclude members of the public and press. The whole Council must resolve by at least a two-thirds majority that the distinction of 'Honorary Freeman or Freewoman of the Parish of Hevingham' be conferred upon the nominee. The name(s) of the individual(s) must not appear in the agenda or minutes of the meeting although the resolution to grant such a title shall be recorded in the Council minutes in the usual way.

3.8 Following a recommendation by Full Council that an award is justified the title of 'Honorary Freeman or Freewoman of the Parish of Hevingham' will be granted by the Chair of the Parish Council and the title holder presented with a certificate citing the grounds for the award. The presentation of a certificate would be made by the Chair at a suitable appropriate event. Albeit that the bestowing of the Freedom of the Parish actually occurs at the point the Council passes the resolution, the presentation ceremony marks the occasion in a public way. A copy of the certificate will be held on record by the Parish Clerk. The roll of Honorary Freemen / Freewomen shall be maintained by the Parish Clerk on the Council's website. The title holder will be able to style themselves 'Honorary Freeman or Freewoman of the Parish of Hevingham' however the title does not convey or carry any legal or financial privileges, powers or rights on the holder.
