



South Tyneside Council

item 7

Borough Council

Date: 8 September 2022

Freedom of the Borough

Report of the Director - Governance and Corporate Affairs

Cabinet Portfolio/Lead Member: Cllr Tracey Dixon, Leader of the Council

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is for Borough Council to consider recommendations in relation to two Freedom of the Borough conferrals.

Introduction

2. Section 249(5) of the Local Government Act 1972 gives South Tyneside Council ('Council') the power to admit as freemen or freewomen of the Borough of South Tyneside, persons who have, in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent services to the area.
3. This honour, Freedom of the Borough, is the highest honour that a local authority can bestow. This rare honour has been awarded by South Tyneside Council to 10 people or organisations since 1981. The most recent recipient of this honour was the South Shields Voluntary Life Brigade in 2017.
4. For such an honour to be conferred, Constitution Committee must first consider any request and where it is considered appropriate must make a recommendation to Borough Council.
5. There is a legal requirement that two thirds of the Borough Council must consent to the motion at a specially convened Extraordinary meeting of Borough Council for the honour to be conferred.
6. Typically, the conferral is followed by a celebration or observance event, in which representatives of the recipient accept a traditional Freedom of the Borough scroll.

Freedom of the Borough Proposal – Ray Spencer

7. A request to confer the honour of Freedom of the Borough to Mr. Ray Spencer MBE was submitted and considered by the Constitution Committee on 27 April 2022.
8. The Constitution Committee considered the application and confirmed that they would like Borough Council to formally recognise Mr. Spencer MBE by asking Borough Council to confer upon him the highest honour it can bestow - the Freedom of the Borough of South Tyneside and arrange an appropriate ceremony to celebrate the conferral of this honour.
9. The Constitution Committee recognised that Mr. Spencer MBE has played a major role in the civic and cultural life of South Tyneside residents over a number of decades.
10. As executive director at the Custom's House, Mr. Spencer MBE has spent over 20 years promoting South Tyneside's performing arts and culture sector and raising the profile of the Borough as a visitor destination.
11. Mr. Spencer MBE is also a well-known and much-loved community figure. In his act as 'Tommy the Trumpeter' across 25 years, he

entertained generations of South Tyneside residents with his live family-oriented performances and activities.

12. Mr Spencer has proactively created opportunities for others to build skills and knowledge in relation to arts and culture, including through his role as a Lecturer at South Tyneside College, and in his role facilitating a great number of performing arts classes and workshops for the people of the Borough.
13. Constitution Committee acknowledged Mr. Spencer MBE as a great supporter of the Council and an enthusiastic facilitator of multi-agency work to bring about improvements for local people. Mr. Spencer MBE has acted as the Master of Ceremonies for numerous civic events and chaired and contributed to a great number of partnership boards and working groups, ranging from the South Tyneside Partnership Board to the Local Cultural Partnership Board. In addition, Mr. Spencer MBE is very active in the community sector, including serving as Chair of the Chloe and Liam Together Trust.

Freedom of the Borough Process – Ray Spencer

14. If Borough Council accepts to proceed with the recommendation of Constitution Committee to confer the freedom of the borough on Mr. Spencer MBE, the next steps would be for Borough Council to resolve to hold an Extraordinary Meeting of Borough Council during the week commencing 24 October 2022 (subject to the availability of family and friends of Mr. Spencer MBE) at which Borough Council would pass the resolution as required by Section 248 of the Local Government Act 1972 to bestow the Freedom of the Borough on Mr. Ray Spencer MBE.

Freedom of the Borough Proposal – Local NHS, Care Sector and Carers and Key Workers

15. In May 2020 Cabinet endorsed a proposal that the Council should seek to confer the Freedom of the Borough, the highest honour that the Council can bestow, to local NHS, carers and other key workers who contributed to keeping local people safe and ensuring essential services continued during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic.
16. At the time, it was agreed that, as it was not safe to confer the honour immediately, the ceremonies traditionally associated with conferral should be postponed until an appropriate point in the future.
17. Due to coronavirus remaining a continuing challenge for the subsequent years, including with restrictions remaining up until February 2022, the usual cycle of Council meetings and committees were disrupted. Whilst the meeting of Constitution Committee on 2 October 2020 was postponed, the Chair of Constitution Committee considered and endorsed the proposal presented to Cabinet and confirmed that they

would like Borough Council to formally recognise Local NHS, Carers and Key Workers by asking Borough Council to confer upon them the highest honour it can bestow - the Freedom of the Borough of South Tyneside and arrange an appropriate ceremony to observe the conferral of this honour.

18. The proposal, endorsed by Cabinet, seeks to formally recognise the tireless and heroic efforts of local NHS and Care staff and all Key Workers in the face of the coronavirus pandemic. The proposal seeks to recognise how local NHS workers, care workers and other Key Workers were vital to public health and safety - from health and social care staff to social workers, food chain workers to postal workers, refuse collectors to delivery drivers and many, many more, they all played a critical role in keeping South Tyneside residents safe and comfortable throughout the lockdown, and that their work contributed to minimising the negative short, medium and long-term impacts of the pandemic. The proposal also suggests that many local NHS and Care staff and Key Workers risked their own health and wellbeing in order to carry out their roles and keep others safe and provided for during the deadly outbreak, demonstrating courage, selflessness, and professionalism.
19. The proposal and discussion at Cabinet concluded that without the efforts of local NHS and Care workers and all Key Workers, many more South Tyneside residents would have died in the outbreak and countless more would have faced pain and hardship.
20. In addition to the conferral of the Freedom of the Borough, the current Council Leadership have explored options for the establishment of multiple permanent Covid memorials at different locations across the Borough, to serve as focal points for reflection on the difficulties of the pandemic. It is suggested that Freedom of the Borough plans are aligned with the unveiling of these memorials.
21. As of August 2022, the memorial designs have been agreed, produced and are currently in the process of being delivered to the local area. Six locations (covering South Shields, Jarrow, Hebburn, Boldon, Cleadon and Whitburn) have been identified for installation.
22. A process of meaningful community engagement is planned, allowing local people to be able to shape the content of the memorial inscriptions, which will include carrying participants sensitively through a series of conversations around their pandemic experiences (including loss, grief, change and transition) and supporting them to work with artist facilitators using creative activities to explore thoughts and ideas, with a view to common threads being drawn together and wording for the inscriptions being finalised over coming months.

Freedom of the Borough Process – Local NHS, Carers and Key Workers

23. If Borough Council accepts to proceed with the recommendation to confer the freedom of the borough on local NHS, Carers and Key Workers, the next steps would be for Borough Council to resolve to hold an Extraordinary Meeting of Borough Council in early March 2023, at which Borough Council would pass the resolution as required by Section 248 of the Local Government Act 1972 to bestow the Freedom of the Borough.
24. Traditionally, Freedom of the Borough ceremonies involve the technical conferral of a scroll to the recipient (or representatives of the recipient group) in the Council Chamber as part of an extraordinary meeting of Council. Given the size of the group it is suggested that in this instance the Extraordinary meeting of Council should take place as usual, involving selected representatives of local NHS, carer and key worker organisations but livestreamed so that all interested local people could take part virtually. Thereafter, in place of the traditional closed celebration, it is suggested that instead the focus should subsequently turn to the unveiling of the six memorials with events modelled on our local approach taken on Remembrance Sunday, including reflection on the journey we have all been on and taking as many positives as possible as we come out of the pandemic whilst at all times being respectful to the work that comes out of the community engagement and consultation process.

Financial and Value for Money Implications

25. There are no financial and value for money implications arising from conferring the honour of Freedom of the Borough. However, there will be costs incurred by the holding of any conferral ceremony including catering, ceremony programme, handmade scroll, and photographer.
26. Any expenditure associated with conferring the Honorary Freedom of the Borough will be from existing budgets and value for money will be exercised at all stages.

Legal Implications

27. Section 249(5) of the Local Government Act 1972 allows for local authorities to admit persons of distinction as freemen or freewomen of the area over which they have authority. The legislation dictates that conferral of such an honour must be consented to by at least two thirds of the Council at an Extraordinary meeting of Borough Council.
28. Originally, such conferment conveyed special privileges of various kinds upon the recipients, but the conferment is now purely honorary.

Risk and Opportunities Implications

29. The conferral of the Freedom of the Borough provides an opportunity for the Council to express thanks and appreciation.
30. As the recommendation is procedural and a recognised part of the business of the Council, no further risk assessment has been undertaken.

Equality and Diversity Implications

31. There are no identified equality and diversity implications arising from this report. We will promote fairness, equality, diversity and inclusion in our community engagement and event planning with regards to the local NHS, Carers and Key Workers proposal, ensuing we respond to the needs of the communities we serve by taking time to listen and understand their concerns so that they know their personal contribution is valued.

Environmental and Sustainability Implications

32. There are no identified environment and sustainability implications arising from this report.

Options to be considered

33. These matters are entirely within the discretion of Council.

Recommendations

34. Borough Council is recommended to:
 - a. Consider and agree to proceed with the Freedom of the Borough Proposal for Mr. Spencer MBE.
 - b. Consider and agree the Freedom of the Borough Proposal for Local NHS, Carers and Key Workers.
 - c. Resolve to hold an Extraordinary Meeting of Borough Council during the week commencing 24 October 2022 (subject to the availability of family and friends of Mr. Spencer MBE) at which Borough Council will be asked to pass the resolution as required by Section 248 of the Local Government Act 1972 to bestow the Freedom of the Borough on Mr. Ray Spencer MBE.
 - d. Resolve to hold an Extraordinary Meeting of Borough Council in early March 2023, at which Borough Council will be asked to pass the resolution as required by Section 248 of the Local Government Act 1972 to bestow the Freedom of the Borough on local NHS, Carers and Key Workers.

- e. Authorise the Director of Governance and Corporate Affairs, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to work through the practical and technical requirements linked with the conferral of the Freedom of the Borough arrangements and associated events to give effect to the above.

Reasons for Recommendations

35. To progress the proposals made in relation to two Freedom of the Borough Conferrals

background papers background papers background papers

Freedom of the Borough

The following is a list of the background papers (excluding exempt papers) relied upon in the preparation of the above report:

Background Paper	File Ref:	File Location
None		

background papers background papers background papers