



Northumberland

County Council

COUNCIL

DATE: 01 SEPTEMBER 2021

Protocols for the appointment of Honorary Aldermen and Alderwomen and for Freemen/Freewomen of Northumberland County Council

Report of Head of Democratic and Electoral Services/ Deputy Monitoring Officer

Cabinet Member: Councillor Glen Sanderson, Leader of the Council

Purpose of report

The purpose of the report is to:

- (i) reinstate the practice of appointing Honorary Aldermen/Alderwomen, and to discuss and agree a protocol for conferring the title on past Councillors from the 2021 elections onwards, subject to specific criteria. No appointments will be made at this meeting as by law, a special Council is required to be convened should this be agreed.
- (ii) to consider and approve a protocol for conferring the title of Freemen and Freewomen of Northumberland.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- (I) the Council agree to the reinstatement of the practice of appointing Honorary Aldermen/Alderwomen from the 2021 election onwards;**
- (ii) a special Council be convened to confer the title of Honorary Aldermen/Alderwomen on those past councillors meeting the criteria;**
- (iii) a system to appoint Freemen and Freewomen of Northumberland be agreed;**
- (iv) the attached the Protocols be approved.**

Key issues and Background

1. Aldermen and Alderwomen

Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972 gives principal councils the power to confer the title of 'Honorary Aldermen, (or Honorary Alderwomen), on persons who have in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent services to the Council but are no longer

members of that authority. Eminent service is not defined in the Act and is left as a matter of local interpretation.

Currently Northumberland County Council has no written protocol or criteria as to how nominations would be made. There is written commentary that it should be the role of the Cabinet to put forward nominations but there is nothing in law or our Constitution to confirm that and Members may agree that the Leader in consultation with the Group Leaders do so via the Chief Executive.

Other authorities use criteria such as length of service (continuous or aggregated), and whether the member held a position such as group Leader, Leader, Deputy Leader, Chair or Vice-Chair of a committee or other senior position, **but the only true criterion is that they have provided *distinguished and exceptional service to the Council* (it is suggested that service to the District Councils prior to reorganisation in 2009 be included) over many years.**

Appointments of Honorary Aldermen/ Alderwomen must take place at a Council meeting specially convened for the purpose. The meeting can occur on the same date of another full council meeting. The nomination will be proposed and seconded. Two thirds of the members present at the meeting must vote in favour of a resolution for the nominee (s) to be appointed as an Honorary Alderman/ Alderwoman.

Following the 2021 Election, 10 members would have met the required length of service should this be one of the criteria accepted.

Members are asked to consider the attached protocol which has been considered by all Group Leaders and agree the criteria to be adopted.

Costs to the council are minimal to cover the certificate and the engraving onto the Honours Board.

2. Honorary Freemen and Freewomen of Northumberland

Section 249(5) of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 empowers the Council to give the title of Honorary Freeman or Freewoman to ***'persons of distinction and any persons who have rendered eminent service to the County'***.

The Freedom itself carries no privileges and is purely an honour to recognise the significant and valuable services rendered to the County by that person. There are no restrictions on eligibility except that the individual must have demonstrated *significant commitment* to the County of Northumberland in some form.

It is suggested that other than in exceptional circumstances, the maximum number of Honorary Freeman or Freewomen to be admitted each municipal year is restricted in recognition of the important status of this award (often as low as 2)

A draft protocol which sets out the process is attached for consideration. This has been considered by the Group Leaders.

- Nominations should be submitted to the Chief Executive/Head of Democratic and Electoral Services.
- All nominations for Honorary Freeman or Freewoman are treated in the strictest confidence and the nominee should not be informed that they have been nominated.
- On receipt of a nomination, the Chief Executive/Head of Democratic and Electoral Services will make the details available to Group Leaders, who will assess the nominee against the criteria.
- A unanimous decision is required to proceed. If Group Leaders are in agreement that the nominee should be made an Honorary Freeman or Freewoman of Northumberland, the nominee will be invited to accept the honour. If agreed, a Special Meeting of the Council will be convened in order for the nomination to be put before the Council and a formal vote taken.
- No fewer than two-thirds of those present at the Council meeting must agree the nomination. The decisions of the Council on all nominations are final.

Assessment Criteria: The following will be taken into account when consideration is given to granting the honour of Honorary Freeman or Freewoman of the County:

Preference will be given to a person who performs in a voluntary capacity, but this should not preclude the honour being awarded to a person whose dedication and contribution is significantly above that expected for their occupation. The contribution to the community of Northumberland should involve one or more of the following:

- a. A significant allocation of the person's time in serving members of the community for the improvement of their well-being.
- b. The promotion, achievement and/or delivery of community services in which a real personal contribution has been made.
- c. A contribution which is seen to stand above the contributions of most others.

Report sign off.

Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:

	Full Name of Officer
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Monitoring Officer/Legal	Neil Masson
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	N/a
Relevant Executive Director	Daljit Lally
Chief Executive	Daljit Lally
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NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

PROTOCOL FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF HONORARY ALDERMEN/ ALDERWOMEN

Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972 states that a Council “*may by resolution passed by not less than two-thirds of the members voting thereon at a meeting of the Council specially convened for the purpose with notice of the object, confer the title of Honorary Aldermen (or Honorary Alderwomen), on persons who have in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent services to the Council but are not then members of that Council*”.

1. Appointment

- 1.1 Appointments of Honorary Aldermen must take place at a County Council meeting specially convened for the purpose. The meeting can occur on the same date as another full council meeting. The nomination will be proposed and seconded. Two thirds of the members present at the meeting must vote in favour of a resolution for the nominee (s) to be appointed as an Honorary Alderman/ Alderwoman.
- 1.2 They will be presented with a certificate confirming the title by the Business Chair or Leader at the next Council meeting and will be given an opportunity to speak. The name of the Honorary Alderman will be placed on an honours board in County Hall.

2. Role

- 2.1 Those appointed to the role of Honorary Alderman or Honorary Alderwoman are entitled to use the title: ‘Honorary Alderman the County of Northumberland’ or ‘Honorary Alderwoman of the County of Northumberland’.
- 2.2 Honorary Aldermen or Alderwomen have the right to attend meetings of the County Council as members of the public. The title does not confer any special privileges or rights upon the appointee to speak or vote at Council meetings, beyond the rights and privileges already afforded to the public. The only rights that are conferred to an Honorary Alderman by virtue of their appointment is to be invited to Civic functions and events by invitation of the Council such as the annual Civic Dinner. They have no formal role on the Council.
- 2.3 The role of Honorary Aldermen or Alderwomen does not carry any right to claim any allowances payable under the Members Allowances Scheme.
- 2.4 Honorary Aldermen or Alderwomen cannot be appointed posthumously.

2.5 The role of Honorary Alderman or Alderwoman is an honorary one, but to the public they are perceived to be a representative of the Council. In taking up this role all Honorary Aldermen and Alderwomen must be aware of this, and:

(a) that the person becoming Alderman or Alderwoman does so in the full knowledge that they are perceived to be representative of the civic element of the Council and must act to the highest standards.

(b) In taking this role, the Alderman or Alderwoman becomes apolitical in public; knowing that any views expressed may be interpreted as views of the Council. Aldermen or Alderwomen are not to speak on behalf of the Council in any way whatever.

3. Criteria for the appointment of an Honorary Aldermen or Alderwomen

3.1 The statutory requirement is that the Council must be satisfied, in conferring the title that the person nominated has 'in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent services to the Council as past members of the Council but who are no longer members of the Council.

3.2 There is no statutory definition of 'eminent service' but the Council will take account of the following matters in determining whether a person has provided eminent service to the Council in the past:

(a) Each nomination will be assessed on its merit.

(b) The length of service as a councillor whether continuous or broken and including former District Council service should be a minimum of 20 years.

(c) Whether the person has held a position such as Leader, Deputy Leader, Chair or Vice-Chair of the Council or Committee or another senior position of the Council.

(d) The extent that a person has contributed to Outside Bodies on behalf of the Council and the commitment given to that role.

(e) The extent to which a person has actively participated in Ward issues on behalf of the Council beyond that normally expected of a councillor. This could include delivering projects with officers or simply acting as an effective liaison between residents and the Council on a number of issues.

(f) Anything else that the former member has done that can be considered as 'eminent service'.

(g) Nominations shall be made in writing setting out the reasons why the person should be nominated and addressed to the Chief Executive who will consult with the Leader of the Council and other political Group Leaders and if there is a sufficient degree of support for conferment of the title, then the Chief Executive will call a special Council meeting for that purpose.

(h) Nominations may be made by serving Councillors

4. Removal of Title of Honorary Alderman

There may be occasions where, due to the past or future behaviour of individuals who have been appointed as Honorary Aldermen or Alderwoman, the Council may wish to remove the title of Honorary Alderman from an individual in order to protect the reputation of the Council. Removal of the title of Honorary Alderman will follow the same process as appointment (proposed and seconded, and then a resolution of two thirds of those present must be passed). However, it may take place at any meeting of Full Council rather than a specially convened meeting.

Version dated 01 September 2021

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

PROTOCOL FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF HONORARY FREEMEN/ FREEWOMEN

Section 249(5) of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 empowers the Council to give the title of Honorary Freeman or Freewoman to ***‘persons of distinction and any persons who have rendered eminent service to the County’***.

1. Appointment

- 1.1 Nominations can be made by any serving Councillor to the Chief Executive. On receipt of a nomination, the Chief Executive will make the details available to Group Leaders, who will assess the nominee against the criteria.
- 1.2 All nominations for Honorary Freeman or Freewoman are treated in the strictest confidence and the nominee should not be informed that they have been nominated.
- 1.3 A unanimous decision is required to proceed. If Group Leaders are in agreement that the nominee should be made an Honorary Freeman or Freewoman of Northumberland, the nominee will then be invited to accept the honour. If agreed, a special meeting of the Council will be convened in order for the nomination to be put before the Council and a formal vote taken.
- 1.4 No fewer than two-thirds of those present at the Council meeting must agree the nomination. The decisions of the Council on all nominations are final.
- 1.5 The awarding of the Freedom of Northumberland to Service Units *‘to march through the streets of the County with bayonets fixed, drums beating and Colours flying’* is different in that it is a generally accepted practice to provide a dignified and appropriate means of enabling the authority to honour a distinguished unit of HM Forces.

2. Role

- 2.1 To be granted the title of Honorary Freeman or Freewoman is a mark of distinction upon the person that the Council wishes to honour.
- 2.2 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 County by that person.
- 2.2 It is normally an honour or award to men or women of note who have lived or worked in the County, and who are proud to be a part of the County's history by becoming Freemen or Freewomen, or in the case of HM Services Units, Freedom of the County.

3. Criteria for the appointment of an Honorary Freeman or Freewoman of Northumberland.

- 3.1 The overriding principle is that these awards should be made on merit, defined as:
 - Significant achievement
 - Exceptional Service

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

Preference will be given to a person who performs in a voluntary capacity, but this should not preclude the honour being awarded to a person whose dedication and contribution is significantly above that expected for their occupation.

- 3.2 The contribution to the community of Northumberland should involve one or more of the following:
 - a Brought distinction to County life and enhanced the County's reputation in the area or activity concerned;
 - b. A significant allocation of the person's time in serving members of the Community for the improvement of their wellbeing;
 - c. The promotion, achievement and/or delivery of community services in which a significant personal contribution has been made;

- d. Demonstrated innovation and entrepreneurship which is delivering results in the County;
- e. A contribution which is seen to stand above the contributions of most others;

3.3 As this is the highest honour that a Council can grant, it should be used sparingly to preserve its status and value.