

Report title	Proposal to confer honorary titles and agree actions and events to mark the 50th anniversary of the creation of Runnymede administrative area
Report author	Mario Leo/Gary Lelliott/Clare Sykes
Department	Law and Governance/Chief Executive's
Exempt?	No
Exemption type	Not applicable
Reasons for exemption	Not applicable

Purpose of report:

To recommend to full Council
To resolve

Synopsis of report:

This report outlines proposals for conferring honorary titles to coincide with commemorating the 50th anniversary of the creation of Runnymede as an administrative area.

Recommendation(s):

- 1. That the Corporate Management Committee recommend to the Council:**
 - a) That North West Surrey Alliance be awarded Freedom of the Borough of Runnymede.**
 - b) That former Councillor Derek Cotty be appointed as an Honorary Alderman.**
- 2. That, subject to the agreement of the Council with the awards detailed in 1. above, the Corporate Management Committee agree to allocate a budget of £6,200 for the above awards, and other associated costs arising from the proposals contained within this report which will be drawn from existing budgets.**

1. Context and background of report

1.1 Runnymede was incorporated as an administrative area on 1 April 1974. The Council is therefore due to celebrate its 50th anniversary in April 2024. It should be noted that whilst Runnymede was granted its Royal Charter in 1978, thus bringing about its Borough Council status it was, as an administrative entity, formed in 1974.

1.2 In order to mark this significant milestone in the borough's history, the Leader of the Council asked officers to consider options for awarding the honorary titles of Freeman/Freewoman of the Borough and Honorary Alderman/Alderwoman to individuals or organisations that have rendered eminent services to the borough.

1.3 Officers were also asked work up a proposal for members' review that allowed for modest celebrations that are sympathetic to the current financial climate.

2. Report and, where applicable, options considered and recommended

Freedom of the Borough

2.1 Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972 ("Section 249") permits principal Councils to award the title of "Freeman/Freewoman of the Borough" to persons of distinction and persons who have, in the opinion of the authority, rendered eminent services to that place or area. Such awards can also be given to organisations that have met the same criteria.

2.2 In acknowledgement of their relationship with the Council, it is proposed to award the Freedom of the Borough of Runnymede to North West Surrey Alliance, particularly in recognition of the Alliance's position of distinction in the community and the eminent services that it has provided to the residents of the borough.

2.3 It is felt that the North West Surrey Alliance's extensive efforts in co-operation with many partners of the Surrey Heartlands Integrated Care System, on behalf of Runnymede's residents who are at the heart of the North West Surrey geographical area, warrants the formal acknowledgement of the Council by way of the Borough's highest honour.

2.4 When thinking back to the pandemic, the response of the NHS was something which the country was and remains most proud of, and this feeling is replicated across Runnymede. This depth of feeling continues post pandemic, and the Council is keen to acknowledge all those who dedicate their careers to support those who need help most.

2.5 The Council wishes to recognise, in particular, the operational workforce, including those who:

- Work within GP practices
- Support residents in their own homes
- Work at accident and emergency and urgent treatment centres
- Work on hospital wards and in other departments at St Peter's Hospital
- Play an equally important role on behalf the Borough's residents in other settings

2.6 Awarding Freedom of the Borough to North West Surrey Alliance ensures that the Council recognises and thanks all who contribute to providing such critical and highly valued services to residents of the Borough.

2.7 The award of Freedom of the Borough will require the agreement of two thirds of those members present at the special meeting of the Council.

Honorary Alderman

- 2.8 Section 249 also permits principal Councils to award the title of Honorary Alderman to former Councillors that have “rendered eminent services to the council as past members of that council, but who are not then of the council”.
- 2.9 In recognition of his longstanding contribution to the Runnymede area and Runnymede Borough Council it is proposed that Derek Cotty has rendered eminent services to the Council by virtue of the significant personal contribution that he delivered through his role as a Councillor in support of the Magna Carta 800 celebrations. Former Councillor Cotty led efforts on behalf of the Council to secure public and private sponsorship of the celebrations, both in the UK, Europe and the United States. Through his drive and tireless work former Councillor Cotty raised the profile and awareness of Magna Carta and its international significance resulting in a period of commemoration over many months to mark the 800th anniversary. Former Councillor Cotty was also a core member of the independent group that developed and delivered the statue of Her Late Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II that now stands on the Runnymede meadows.
- 2.10 The award of Honorary Alderman will require the agreement of two thirds of those members present at the special meeting of the Council.

Official celebrations for the awards

- 2.11 Typically, for most Councils, this includes the purchasing of a scroll and the hosting of a celebratory event for members of the council and the recipient of the title. The practice at Runnymede Borough Council has been in keeping with this custom and it is proposed to hold a reception following the presentations.
- 2.12 Due to the cost of hosting such events, it is proposed that the celebrations for each of the awards detailed above be combined into a broader event, in the form of an extraordinary meeting of the Council, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the incorporation of Runnymede as an administrative body.
- 2.13 A list of official invitees will be drawn up, to consist of the awardees and their guests, civic dignitaries including past mayors, the deputy lieutenant, local MPs, representatives of twinned towns, and other individuals considered to have played an important role within and on behalf of the Council.

Other proposals

- 2.14 As part of the celebrations to mark the 50th anniversary of the creation of Runnymede, it is proposed that a modest plaque be commissioned, for installation outside the Council Chamber, alongside other commemorative pieces already in place.
- 2.15 In recognition of the contributions made by councillors and staff, members are asked to consider whether a commemorative pen, pendant or similar token should be issued to each councillor and member of staff. This would be consistent with a previous celebration, where a commemorative coin was issued for the Magna Carta 800th anniversary celebrations.
- 2.16 Given the significance of the Borough to its local residents, a boroughwide competition among residents is proposed. The details of the competition will be

finalised in discussion with the Mayor, but may include an artwork or photography competition, or a poetry competition.

- 2.17 The winner and a small number of their guests would be received at the extraordinary meeting of the Council in Spring 2024.
- 2.18 An exhibition celebrating the borough's history, hosted at Chertsey Museum, is being planned. The exhibition will be organised by the museum's curator and costs will be met from the museum's existing budget.
- 2.19 Whilst it will not form part of the borough's formal celebrations, the Mayor is also planning to acknowledge the borough's history with dignitaries from the German city of Bergisch Gladbach during their annual town twinning visit to the borough during Spring 2024. Any such events will be met from the Mayor's existing budget.

3. Policy framework implications

- 3.1 None.

4 Resource implications/Value for Money

- 4.1 Section 249 provides that a "principal council may spend such reasonable sums as they think fit for the purpose of presenting an address, or a casket containing an address, to a person on whom they have conferred the title of Honorary Alderman or Honorary Alderwoman". A similar provision exists for awarding the title of freeman or freewoman.
- 4.2 Due to an underspend on the committee printing budget, arising from a higher than expected number of Councillors receiving electronic copies of documents at the present time, a budget of £6,200 has been identified to cover the cost of the following:
 - Scrolls and frames
 - Celebratory evening in Spring 2024
 - Commemorative plaque
 - Token items for councillors and staff
- 4.2 Subject to the agreement of the proposals set out in this report, the underspend would be transferred into a new budget as part of a virement under officer delegation.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 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 or body on whom it is conferred or as recognition of significant and valuable services

rendered to the borough by that person or body. It should not be awarded to serving councillors.

- 5.3 Section 249 deals with the admission to the Freedom of the Borough by Borough Councils of 'persons of distinction and persons who have in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent services to the Borough'.
- 5.4 Section 249 provides that a special meeting of the Council 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 can take place on the same date as a normal Full Council meeting but must be a separate meeting, so it will normally take place before the scheduled meeting.
- 5.5 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.
- 5.6 Section 249 also gives the power to confer the title of 'Honorary Alderman' (or 'Honorary Alderwoman') on persons who have, in the opinion of the council, rendered eminent services to the council as past members of that council, but who are no longer members of the council. Section 249 does not specify how eminent services are defined, and this is left as a matter of local interpretation.
- 5.7 As with the conferring of the honour of Freeman the appointment of Honorary Aldermen must take place at a Council meeting specially convened for the purpose. Two thirds of the members present at the meeting must vote in favour of a resolution for the nominee to be appointed as an Honorary Alderman.
- 5.8 The title of Honorary Alderman 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.
- 5.9 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. The Council will decide which Civic functions and events it is appropriate to invite Honorary Aldermen to.

6. Equality implications

- 6.1 Equalities impact assessments will be conducted on specific elements of the proposals set out within this report, where necessary or appropriate.

7. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications

- 7.1 None.

8. Other implications (where applicable)

- 8.1 None.

9. Timetable for Implementation

- 9.1 The Corporate Management Committee is required to make recommendations to a specially convened meeting of the Council. It is proposed that a special meeting be

held on the same evening as the ordinary Council on 19 October 2023, with the ordinary meeting to commence at the rise of the special meeting. It is necessary for the Council to consider the proposed awards at this stage due to the lead in times for ordering scrolls for the recipients. It is also necessary to give advance notice to a number of individuals and invitees.

- 9.2 Should the Council agree the awards, it is proposed to hold an extraordinary meeting of the Council 26 March 2024, to coincide with the borough's 50th anniversary, during which the honorary awards and other celebrations will take place.

10. Conclusions

- 10.1 Runnymede has a tradition of exercising the powers granted by Section 249 to confer honorary titles. To date that power has been exercised on nine occasions to confer titles on eight individuals and one military unit. As explained above it is used to acknowledge the services provided by the recipients to the local community.

11. Background papers

- None.

12. Appendices

- None.