

Brighton & Hove City Council

Council

Agenda Item 26

Subject: Honorary Freedom of the City

Date of meeting: 10 July 2025

Report of: Elizabeth Culbert, Director Governance & Law (Monitoring Officer)

Contact Officer: Victoria Simpson, Senior Lawyer – Corporate Law
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Ward(s) affected: All

For general release

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

- 1.1 This Report describes the powers the Council has to award the honorary Freedom of the City and recommends that Council formally approves the policy attached at Appendix 1.
- 1.2 Publication of a transparent and clear policy which explains how the Freedom of the City can be nominated to aligns with the Council Plan priority to ensure our services are easy to access, that customers are kept informed and that their view are listened to.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Council approve the Policy attached as Appendix 1 with immediate effect.

3. Context and background information

- 3.1 The award of the Freedom of the City is an honorary one, which local authorities may choose to award to those people who, in the opinion of the Council, have rendered eminent service to the council or the city.
- 3.2 The legal framework which provides for the award of the Freedom of the City is outlined in paragraph 8 below. The framework gives Councils leeway to determine their own selection process and to make such appointments to this honorary award as they see fit.
- 3.3 Brighton & Hove City Council's existing arrangements have been in place since 2012. A list of former recipients is attached as Appendix 2. There is currently not a published policy in place which clearly sets out the criteria for the award and the award has therefore been managed on an ad hoc and reactive basis.
- 3.4 Officers have therefore explored options for making the process for nominating someone for this award more inclusive and transparent, as a

means of acknowledging a more diverse range of people who have made a significant contribution to this city. This report is the outcome of that work

A Policy which encourages an inclusive approach

- 3.5 As noted above, the legislation which governs this award is silent on how nominees might be selected. As a result, local authorities are free to exercise their discretion as they see fit.
- 3.6 The criteria included in the updated Policy aim to encourage consideration not just of reputational impact but also the actual contribution made by nominees to the people of this city: a contribution which could involve (for instance) improving the lives of residents day to day. The suggested wording aims to be as wide as possible to recognise those with a local connections whose achievements may provide others with inspiration and/or enhance perceptions of this city.
- 3.7 It is proposed that the process by which nominations for this award may be made is published and clearly sets out how residents and other stakeholders may make nominations for consideration by filling in a single form. Information about this will be published on the Council's website – including the deadlines for nominations.
- 3.8 The policy provides that all nominations received in are reviewed annually by a group made up of Leaders of each of the Council's political Groups. That group will review nomination(s) – normally one per calendar year – to be put to a meeting of full Council for approval. Leaders' Group will aim for a consensus approach, noting the legal requirement for the nomination to receive the support of a two thirds majority of those in attendance and voting at a Special Council meeting.

4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

- 4.1 The Council's only statutory means of recognising services or significant contributions to the city is that of conferring the Freedom of the City. For this reason, no alternative options have been considered.

5. Community engagement and consultation

- 5.1 Consideration of community engagement is at the heart of this proposal, which seeks to open up the process for awarding the Freedom of the City so that nominations can be made by anyone and everyone can understand and access the process and criteria. Leaders Group has been consulted on the proposal, with the draft policy shared for comment.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 Conferring the honour of Freedom of the City has potential to be a means of acknowledging key contributions made by residents and stakeholders of the city across any number of spheres. This proposed update to the Council's approach aims to open up its potential as a tool for acknowledging achievement, in a way which provides inspiration for the future.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The costs arising from the award of this title is expected to be met from within existing resources.

Name of finance officer consulted: Haley Woollard Date consulted: 26/06/25

8. Legal implications

- 8.1 Section 249 (5) The Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009) enables the councils of cities to confer the status of honorary freeman/freewoman on "(a) persons of distinction and (b) persons who have, in the opinion of the council, rendered eminent services to the local area". The award of the title of Honorary Freeman must be approved by a resolution passed by not less than two-thirds of the Members voting at a meeting of the council specially convened for the purpose. The Freedom of the City confers no rights: while it is the highest honour a Council may award, it is largely of symbolic importance.

Name of lawyer consulted: Victoria Simpson Date consulted: 12/06/2025

9. Risk implications

- 9.1 The only risk identified is the potential reputational risk of the Council conferring the Freedom of the City on a person who is subsequently found to have acted in a way which is inconsistent with the Council's values. This risk is considered likely to manifest only rarely, and where it does arise then a mechanism exists for revoking the honour.

10. Equalities implications

- 10.1 The Freedom of the City is a civic honour that can be granted by the Council on deserving recipients and has in the past been awarded sparingly to maintain the significance of the award. It is recognised that the way in which the Freedom of the City has been awarded historically was not as inclusive as it should have been, as a policy, criteria and timescales were not published on the Council's website. The proposed arrangements aim to allow for an approach which is more inclusive, including in relation to how nominations may be made.

11. Sustainability implications

- 11.1 There are no sustainability implications arising from the report.

12. Other Implications

- 12.1 No other significant implications have been identified as arising from the report.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Policy on awarding the honorary title of Freedom of the City
Appendix 2 – List of past recipients of the title

