



COUNCIL

Wednesday, 16 February 2022

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	HONORARY FREEDOM OF THE BOROUGH - FRANK ERNEST FIELD, BARON FIELD OF BIRKENHEAD
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	DIRECTOR OF LAW AND GOVERNANCE (MONITORING OFFICER)

## REPORT SUMMARY

Under the Local Government Act 1972, the Council has the power to grant a person the title of Honorary Freeman or Freewoman of the Borough to persons of distinction who have rendered eminent service to the Borough.

This is a very significant step for the Council to take. Very few people have been awarded this status and, quite rightly, it should only be awarded to someone who has made an exceptional contribution to the Borough. Frank Field, Baron Field of Birkenhead is considered to be within this category.

Past recipients of this award are:

1993	Lt Commander Ian Fraser, VC
1996	Mr Joseph Lynch, GC, BEM (GAL)
2005	Mr Ray Holmes
2006	The Right Reverend David Urquhart
2006	Lord Chan of Oxton
2010	Mr Stephen Maddox OBE
2016	PC David Philips
2017	The Hillsborough 96
2019	Doctor Nunzia Bertali
2019	2nd Lt Jay Frederick Simpson USAF

In order to confer this honour on Frank Field, Baron Field of Birkenhead, the Council will need to pass a resolution by not less than two-thirds of the Members voting thereon at a meeting of the Council specially convened for the purpose, where notice of the object of the meeting has been given.

## RECOMMENDATION/S

It is recommended to the Council: That

- (1) in pursuance of the provisions of Section 249(5) of the Local Government Act 1972 and in recognition of his dedicated service to the borough during his 40 years as MP for the Birkenhead Constituency, Frank Field be admitted as an Honorary Freeman of this Borough at an Extraordinary Council meeting to be held at 6pm on 16 February 2022; and

- (2) Officers be requested to take all of the necessary actions associated with (1) above and arrange a small civic reception for Frank Field's family, friends, colleagues and some invited guests to take place on a date to be agreed.

## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

### **1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 1.1 To honour Frank Field, Baron Field of Birkenhead for his eminent service to the borough and the people of Wirral.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 No other options are being considered.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 The origin of the Freedom of the Borough goes back to early medieval times, when with the growth of the great English towns, there emerged a class of citizen known as Freemen, who enjoyed important privileges in the government of their own and in the matter of corporate property, as against strangers and the rest of the inhabitants.
- 3.2 With the passing of the Honorary Freedom of the Boroughs Act 1885 the dignity attached to the Office of Freeman was revived and enhanced. This Act conferred upon all Municipal Corporations the power to admit as Honorary Freeman of the Borough "persons of distinction and any persons who have rendered eminent services to the Borough". This can only be achieved by the Council voting at a specially called meeting.
- 3.3 The Freedom of the Borough is the highest award the Council can bestow.
- 3.4 Frank Ernest Field, Baron Field of Birkenhead, CH, PC, DL (born 16 July 1942) was a British politician who was the Member of Parliament (MP) for Birkenhead from 1979 to 2019, serving as a Labour MP until August 2018 and thereafter as an Independent. In 2019, he formed the Birkenhead Social Justice Party and stood unsuccessfully as its sole candidate in the 2019 election. After leaving the House of Commons he was awarded a life peerage in 2020 and subsequently sat in the House of Lords as a crossbencher.
- 3.5 Frank was born in Edmonton, Middlesex, on 16 July 1942, the second of three sons. His father was a labourer at the Morgan Crucible Company's factory in Battersea, and his mother a primary school welfare worker at Belmont Primary School in Chiswick. His parents were Conservatives "who believed in character and pulling oneself up by one's own bootstraps".
- 3.6 Frank was educated at St Clement Danes School, then in Hammersmith, before studying economics at the University of Hull. In his youth he was a member of the Conservative Party but left in 1960 because of his opposition to apartheid in South Africa and joined the Labour Party. In 1964, he became a further education teacher in Southwark and Hammersmith.
- 3.7 Frank served as a Labour councillor for Turnham Green on Hounslow London Borough Council from 1964 until 1968, when he lost his seat. He was Director of the Child Poverty Action Group from 1969 to 1979, carrying out research and influencing policies on income and expenditure for families below the poverty line, and the Low Pay Unit from 1974 to 1980.

- 3.8 Frank unsuccessfully contested the constituency of South Buckinghamshire at the 1966 general election, where he was defeated by the sitting Conservative MP Ronald Bell. He was selected to contest the safe Labour seat of Birkenhead at the 1979 general election on the retirement of the sitting MP Edmund Dell.
- 3.9 He held the seat with a majority of 5,909 and remained the constituency's MP until November 2019 increasing the majority during that time to over 25,000.
- 3.10 In Parliament, Frank was made a member of the Opposition frontbench by the Labour leader Michael Foot as a spokesman on education in 1980 but was dropped a year later. Following the appointment of Neil Kinnock as the Labour leader in 1983, Frank was appointed as a spokesman on health and social security for a year. He was appointed the chairman of the social services select committee in 1987, becoming the chairman of the new social security select committee in 1990, a position he held until the 1997 election.
- 3.11 Following the 1997 election, with Labour now in power, Frank joined the government led by Tony Blair as its Minister for Welfare Reform, working in the Department of Social Security (DSS). Blair has said his mission was to "think the unthinkable".
- 3.12 His time as a minister was shortlived however and he resigned after a short period of time in office, and he often quoted Tony Blair as saying "some people are just not cut out to be ministers"
- 3.13 However he was chosen as Chair of Social Security and Pensions Committee by other MPs and served in that role for several years during the Conservative Governments of Theresa May and David Cameron.
- 3.14 His time as MP for Birkenhead was characterized by his work to improve living standards and life chances for those living in some of the most deprived parts of the country.
- 3.15 He lobbied hard and was successful in bringing employment to Birkenhead with the Child Support Agency and helping to win contracts for Cammell Lairds to maintain shipbuilding in the town.
- 3.16 His priority was to address the causes of poverty as well as relieving the impact of it.
- 3.17 He was able to use experiences of those living in Birkenhead to help shape policy at a national level on social security and was instrumental in shaping Sure Start as a policy and the Foundation Years projects as a means of helping to improve life chances for children.
- 3.18 In more recent years he has worked to eliminate hunger and again was a mover in developing nationally the holiday play and food which started in Birkenhead and has now become a national policy.
- 3.19 He started Feeding Birkenhead with its network of social supermarkets and Café 7 as a citizen's supermarket and Feeding Britain has developed from that.
- 3.20 His work on the "gig" economy has brought about reform of working conditions of people employed by some of the large companies and he lead the campaign to get

pension compensation from BHS when the company ceased to trade and it was discovered that its pension fund had been rifled.

- 3.21 Frank has also been a co-founder of the Cool Earth project which aims to preserve the rain forests.
- 3.22 It was a great sadness to Frank that he could no longer be a member of the Labour Party, but he always hoped that a new era would bring about the reforms he wanted to see, and he never lost his commitment to bringing about social justice and after leaving Labour he stood for the Social Justice Party in 2019, but lost the seat.
- 3.23 Frank has always been recognised as a fierce campaigner for Birkenhead and leading figure on the subject of welfare reform.
- 3.24 As a well respected and long serving Member of Parliament for the Borough, many of his colleagues and friends (and political opponents) would concur with the words of Wirral Chief Executive, Paul Satoor who said:

*“Frank served the people of Birkenhead as their MP with distinction for 40 years, as well as holding a number of important roles within Parliament, Government and in opposition.*

*“Though born in London, he took Birkenhead into his heart after his election in 1979. He championed many important campaigns - not just within his constituency but also across the rest of Wirral, Merseyside and nationally – on a range of issues.*

*“He was particularly committed to supporting the most disadvantaged people in society and in 2013 he set up an All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger, which published a major report on the growth in the numbers of people relying on food banks. This in turn led to him setting up ‘Feeding Britain’ as a charitable organisation to help put the group’s proposals into action to reduce and prevent hunger.*

*“Wirral had a friend and loyal advocate in Frank Field and the Council joins with many residents in remembering his long service and contribution to the borough of Wirral.”*

#### **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The modest financial implications can be met from within existing budgets.

#### **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The Council may by a resolution passed by not less than two-thirds of the Members voting thereon at a meeting of the Council specifically convened for the purpose with notice of the purpose, admit to be Honorary Freemen or Freewoman of the place or area for which it is the authority persons/organisations of distinction and persons/organisations who have in its opinion rendered eminent services to the Borough. (Section 249(5), of the Local Government Act 1972.)

#### **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

- 6.1 There are no implications associated with staffing, ICT or assets.

## **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 7.1 There are no risks identified with the implementation of the recommendations contained within this report.

## **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 Prior to the matter being presented to Council, all nominations in respect of individuals, groups of individuals, or organisations are circulated as a matter of courtesy to the Mayor and Political Group Leaders.

## **9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity. No equality issues have been identified as arising from this report.

## **10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 The content and/or recommendations contained within this report are expected to have no impact on emissions of Greenhouse Gases

## **11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 It is anticipated that the content and recommendations contained within this report will help enhance the Council's objectives of a thriving, healthy, accessible, safe and attractive Borough, and by way of encouraging community involvement in volunteering, education, donations to charities and other aspirations will maintain the tradition whereby public recognition may be given to recipients and as an expression of the highest esteem in which they are held by the Council and people of the Borough.

### **REPORT AUTHOR:**

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## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Wirral Council Constitution Part 5, Section 10  
UK Parliament, Lord Field of Birkenhead – Parliamentary Career & Hansard  
Frank Field, Parliamentary Personal Website  
Other: en.wikipedia.org