



REGULATORY & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 7 June 2023

REPORT TITLE:	HONORARY FREEDOM OF THE BOROUGH (POSTHUMOUS AWARD) – PAUL O’GRADY MBE DL
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF LAW & GOVERNANCE (MONITORING OFFICER)

REPORT SUMMARY

Under the Local Government Act 1972, the Council has the power to grant 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, it should only be awarded to someone who has made an exceptional contribution to the Borough. Paul O’Grady MBE DL, Comedian, Broadcaster, Actor and Writer who was born and raised in Birkenhead and who sadly passed away on 28th March 2023 aged 67 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 Phillips
The Hillsborough 96
2019 Doctor Nunzia Bertali
2019 2nd Lt. Jay Frederick Simpson USAF
2022 Baron Frank Field of Birkenhead
2022 Andrew Devine

The Wirral Plan 2021 - 2026 sets out the Council’s vision to secure the best possible future for the Council’s residents and covers the following five themes:

- A thriving and inclusive economy, creating jobs and opportunities for all;
- A clean-energy, sustainable borough, leading the way in tackling the environment crisis;

- Brighter futures for all regardless of their background;
- Safe and pleasant communities that our residents are proud of; and
- Healthy and active lives for all, with the right care, at the right time.

By recommending the recognition of eminent service to the community, the proposals within this report align with the theme of safe and pleasant communities that our residents are proud of.

If recommended to Council and subsequently approved a scroll will be presented to a family representative by the Mayor.

This matter affects all Wards within the Borough.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Regulatory and General Purposes Committee is requested to recommend to 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, that Paul O'Grady MBE DL be posthumously admitted as Honorary Freeman of this Borough at an Extraordinary Council Meeting to be held on 10 July 2023; and

(2) officers be requested to take all the necessary actions associated with (1) above and arrange for a small civic reception for family representatives of Paul O'Grady MBE DL, and some invited guests on a mutually agreeable date following the extraordinary meeting of Council.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 To posthumously honour Paul O’Grady MBE DL Comedian, Broadcaster, Actor and Writer for his eminent service to the Borough and the people of Wirral.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 The alternative option is for this Committee not to recommend to Council that Paul O’Grady MBE DL be admitted as an Honorary Freeman of this Borough.

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 Paul O’Grady MBE DL was born on 14 June 1955 at St Catherine’s Hospital in Tranmere, Birkenhead. He spent his early life at the family’s rented home at 23 Holly Grove in Higher Tranmere and attended St Joseph’s Catholic Primary School. He then attended Blessed Edmund Campion R.C Secondary Modern and the Corpus Christi High School. He was enrolled in the Cub Scouts and was an altar boy at a local Catholic Church. He then joined the Marine Cadet Section of the Sea Cadet Corps and at the advice of his captain joined the Boys’ Amateur Boxing Club.
- 3.5 Paul left school aged 16 and obtained a job in the civil service, working as a clerical assistant for the DHSS at their Liverpool office. He also worked part-time at the bar of the Royal Air Forces Association (RAFA) club in Oxton.
- 3.6 Paul briefly worked as an assistant clerk at Liverpool Magistrates’ Court and subsequently as a barman at Yates’s Wine Lodge however following the birth of his daughter in May 1974 realised this wage was insufficient to support both himself and his daughter and travelled to London but only found poorly paid work as a barman. He returned to Birkenhead and was employed as an accountant in FMC Meats Merseyside, he then worked for three years at the Children’s Convalescent Home and School in West Kirby, a home for disabled and abused children.

- 3.7 Paul returned to London and whilst working for Camden Social Services, Paul O’Grady made his first attempt at putting together a drag act creating the character of Lily Savage and performed annually as Lily from 1989 to 1992. He subsequently appeared on a number of TV and radio shows and in April 1996 filmed a performance at the LWT Tower as An Evening with Lily Savage, broadcast on ITV in November and was awarded Best Entertainment Program at the 1997 National Television Awards.
- 3.8 He subsequently hosted other Entertainment programmes including game shows Blankety Blank and Eyes Down as well as travel shows. From 2004-2011, Paul had his own daytime show, The Paul O’Grady Show and Paul O’Grady Live. From 2012-2023 the documentary series Paul O’Grady: For the Love of Dogs was launched where he became an ambassador for Battersea Dogs and Cats Home.
- 3.9 In 2005, Liverpool John Moores University awarded Paul O’Grady an honorary fellowship for services to entertainment and in 2010 he received an honorary Doctor of Arts from De Montfort University in Leicester in recognition of his outstanding contribution to television, radio and the stage.
- 3.10 Paul O’Grady supported a number of philanthropic causes for carers. In 2008 he became an ambassador for Save the Children. In 2014 he co-starred in a Dementia Friends TV advertisement campaign to raise awareness about the disease. In 2015 following his work on Animal Orphans he became a patron of Orangutan Appeal UK. In September 2016, he was recognised for his work with animals when he won the award for Outstanding Contribution to Animal Welfare at the RSPCA’s Animal Hero Awards. During the last 20 years of his life he lived in Kent and accepted the unpaid position of Deputy Lieutenant of Kent in 2022.
- 3.11 Paul O’Grady died unexpectedly on 28 March 2023 at age 67. He was hailed by many as a national treasure.

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 Paul O’Grady to be Honorary Freeman 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 known risks associated with this report.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

8.1 Political Group Leaders have been consulted and support the proposals.

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. Measuring the impact of equality implications and mitigating any negative impact where possible is embedded into the core principles of good governance. There are no equality implications arising from this report.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 This report is for information purposes and as such, there are no direct environment and climate implications.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 This report is for information purposes and as such, there are no direct Community Wealth Implications.

REPORT AUTHOR: Anne Beauchamp
Democratic Services Officer
Tel: 0151 691 8322
email: annebeauchamp@wirral.gov.uk

APPENDICES

None

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Wirral Council Constitution Part 5, Section 19
Online sources

TERMS OF REFERENCE

This report is being considered by the Regulatory and General Purposes Committee in accordance with Section 8.2 of its Terms of Reference

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
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Not applicable	
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