



REGULATORY & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 13 June 2024

REPORT TITLE:	HONORARY FREEDOM OF THE BOROUGH – DAVID ARMSTRONG
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF LAW & CORPORATE SERVICES (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. It should only be awarded to someone who has made an exceptional contribution to the Borough. David Armstrong 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
2016 The Hillsborough 96
2019 Doctor Nunzia Bertali
2019 2nd Lt. Jay Frederick Simpson USAF
2022 Baron Frank Field of Birkenhead
2022 Andrew Devine
2023 Paul O'Grady
2023 Glenda Jackson
2023 Sue Higginson

The proposals contained in the report support all themes within the Council Plan: Wirral Working Together 2023 – 27.

If recommended to Council and subsequently approved, a scroll will be presented to David Armstrong 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, David Armstrong be admitted as Honorary Freeman of this Borough at an Extraordinary Council Meeting to be held on 22 July 2024; and
- (2) the Director of Law and Corporate Services be requested to:
 - (a) take all the necessary actions associated with (1) above; and
 - (b) arrange for a small civic reception for family representatives of David Armstrong, and 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 honour David Armstrong for his eminent public 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 David Armstrong 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 opposed to 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. The Freedom of the Borough is the highest award the Council can bestow.
- 3.3 David Armstrong was born and raised in a village near Workington on the West Cumbrian coast. He remains very proud of his West Cumbrian roots. David trained to teach in Manchester and after four years in the city sought his first job there as a Scale 1 Primary School Teacher on a Manchester overspill estate in 1975. He subsequently worked in three other primary schools including a small rural primary school at Great Budworth, near Northwich in Cheshire, where he was Headteacher for 5 years.
- 3.4 In 1990 David Armstrong joined the Council in the Education Department as General Inspector, Development. This was a post which combined works supporting schools generally as well as being responsible for school building matters. The post brought together his two passions in work, children and schools and buildings and construction.
- 3.5 In his 34 years at the Council, David Armstrong undertook a variety of roles, consistently demonstrating his flexibility and willingness to do whatever was asked of him. A series of events in the Council, led in June 2012 to him being asked to cover the Chief Executive role for a period and then from late 2012 to cover a number of other senior roles as needs arose. He took on the role of Acting Chief Executive again in 2015 for a short time. He has never shied away when times at the Council have been most challenging, stepping up for the Council, its staff and local residents when it was needed the most. He is recognised by past and present Members and

officers to be 100% committed to the Borough of Wirral, and its residents, through his career as a true public servant.

3.6 During his time at the Council, David Armstrong held many different roles. Each and every day, he strived to make a positive difference for the borough. Examples of his work and approach included:

- mentoring staff in his own time;
- making sure that colleagues who had gone above the call of duty were themselves recognised;
- being the first person at the site of an emergency
- using his own money to support people in their time of crisis;
- spending many hours negotiating and supporting community groups through times of change;
- driving difficult, lengthy and complex issues through to resolution;
- ensuring there was support and cooperation to see Wirral through to a successful future,

3.7 When proposing him for the honour of Freeman of the Borough, The Leader of the Council, Councillor Paul Stuart described David Armstrong as the “Council’s organisational memory, its conscience and its heart.”

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 in accordance with section 249(5), of the Local Government Act 1972 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 admit David Armstrong to be an Honorary Freeman of the borough on the basis of being a person of distinction and who has in its opinion rendered eminent services to the Borough.

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 There are no direct environment and climate implications arising from the proposals within this report.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no direct Community Wealth Implications arising from the proposals within this report.

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APPENDICES

None

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Wirral Council Constitution Part 5, Section 19
Local Government Act 1972

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
Not applicable	