



Subject:	Process for Considering Requests for the Freedom of the City
Date:	22 nd September 2017
Reporting Officer:	John Walsh, City Solicitor
Contact Officer:	Stephen McCrory, Democratic Services Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	To consider the process applied for requests for the conferment of the Freedom of the City.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agree not to make any change to the established process for considering requests for the Freedom of the City but to agree that the award will not be granted more than once in any Council term except when there are exceptional circumstances• Agree to receive a further report at October's Strategic Policy & Resources Committee considering an approach to some form of recognition for individuals or

	organisations at a lower level than the award of the Freedom of the City
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p><u>Background</u></p> <p>The former Council's policy on consideration of requests for the award of the Freedom of the City was agreed in 1996.</p> <p>In 2013, the Council agreed to bestow the honour of the Freedom of the City to two individuals – Van Morrison and Dame Mary Peters. Prior to this, there was a period of 11 years when no such awards were made. In 2015, the Freedom was awarded to Michael Longley and to the Nursing Service in Belfast. There are now a total of 81 Freemen of the City.</p>
3.2	<p><u>Legislation</u></p> <p>The Local Government (Modification of Borough Charters) Order (Northern Ireland) 1973 has been revoked by the Local Government (Transitional, Incidental, Consequential and Supplemental Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015. The rules are now much simpler. The award can be agreed by the Council by way of a special resolution by a simple majority vote and there is not any need for 10 days' notice of the special Council meeting to be given.</p> <p>Although the new legislation does not require a 2/3 majority of the Council to support a proposal to award the Freedom of the City, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 20th November, 2015 agreed that the Council would continue with its previous policy as set out below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a request is received from a Member of Council or a member of the public for the Freedom of the City to be conferred, the Democratic Services Manager will liaise with the Party Leaders on the Council to ascertain the level of support which the proposal would have. • Once the level of support is known, a report will be submitted in the first instance to the Budget and Transformation Panel so that an informal discussion of the proposal can take place and any minor issues resolved. • If there is at least 2/3 of the whole number of Members (40 Member) supportive of the proposal, then the Chief Executive will contact the proposed recipient to ask if they would be amenable to accepting the award should the Council offer it. If there is

	<p>a positive response, a report will be submitted to the next available meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee recommending that the award be made and requesting it to set a date for a meeting of the Council to formally consider the proposal.</p>
3.3	<p><u>Current policy</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council can recognise individuals and organisations whom it considers have rendered eminent service to the city, those who have brought distinction to the city or Northern Ireland or those who have made an outstanding contribution to the wider national or international sphere. • Proposals are received by the Chief Executive who brings, outside the committee system, the proposal to the party group leaders to ascertain party support. If there is not enough support for the honour (in other words over two-thirds), the Chief Executive privately and discreetly informs the proposer; thus avoiding unnecessary embarrassment to the individual or group being proposed. If there is support, the Chief Executive then contacts the individual or group to ascertain if the individual or group would be willing to accept the award if the Council were to offer it. • If the Chief Executive is satisfied that there is likely to be enough support within the Council and the proposed recipient has agreed to accept the award, if offered, the Chief Executive shall submit the proposal to the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee. If the Committee supports the proposal, a special meeting of the full council will be arranged. <p>There are currently no limits on the number of people who can receive the award.</p>
3.4	<p><u>Strengths of current policy</u></p> <p>The current policy does not tie councillors down to a rigid framework or set criteria that could become inflexible – it leaves the decision to the discretion of the councillors.</p>
3.5	<p><u>Issues with current policy</u></p> <p>There have been previous concerns raised that this honour could become over used, lessening the prestige of the award.</p> <p>It is not suggested that there should be any major change to the policy for the award of the Freedom of the City but rather that there is a recognition that this award should only be used infrequently so as to maintain the prestige of the office of Freeman.</p>

3.6	<p><u>Possible addition to the current policy</u></p> <p>Following discussions with the Party Leaders, at their meeting on 27th April and last month, it was agreed that the Council should consider adding to its current policy to provide for some form of recognition for individuals or organisations at a lower level than the award of the Freedom of the City. Subject to Committee agreement and consideration of the issues it is suggested that a further report is brought to Strategic Policy & Resources in October considering such an approach.</p>
3.7	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>None associated with this report.</p>
3.8	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>None associated with this report.</p>
4.0	<p><u>Appendices – Documents Attached</u></p>
	None