



Okehampton Town Council

Honorary Freeman (Freewoman) Policy

Policy Statement

The Town Council wishes to recognise the efforts of members of the community who demonstrate outstanding commitment to the well-being of Okehampton. The Council will do this, in special circumstances that meet the criteria of this policy, by awarding the title of Honorary Freeman (or Freewoman) of Okehampton.

This honour will be awarded only on rare and exceptional occasions and stands apart from the annual mayoral award presentations made at the Mayor Choosing ceremony.

Background

Before the municipal reforms of 1835, there was a class of persons known as "freemen" in old corporate boroughs, enjoying special rights in the corporate property. The right to be admitted a freeman rested upon the custom of the borough, varied by the terms of its charter and, in certain cases, by local statutory provision.

Generally, the admission of a freeman, as distinct from the conferment of the honour of an honorary freedom, might be acquired, inter alia, by marriage, birth or employment to an existing freeman. The effect of successive reforms of local government law has been to continue the custom of maintaining a roll of freemen and regulating admission to it.

Pursuant to section 248 of the Local Government Act 1972 Act (the 1972 Act) as amended by section 27 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (the 2009 Act,) the admission of freemen (as opposed to admitting honorary freemen and honorary freewomen) of a pre-1974 municipal borough is approved by the chairman of the district council of the district in which the former borough lies.

After local government reorganisation in 1974, a number of local authorities were given the power to admit honorary aldermen and freemen pursuant to section 249 of the 1972 Act. However, that power was not extended to parish councils in England or community councils in Wales.

Prior to January 2010 only 10 local councils had the standing to confer the title of honorary freeman; seven in England (the councils of the cathedral cities of Chichester, Ely, Hereford, Lichfield, Ripon, Truro and Wells) and 3 in Wales (the councils of the cities of Bangor and St David's and the Royal Town of Caernarfon).

On the 12th January 2010 the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 amended the provisions of the 1972 Act to enable all local councils to confer honorary titles. By virtue of section 249 (5)-(10) of the 1972 Act as amended, all local councils may exercise powers to confer the title of "honorary freeman" or "honorary freewoman," to persons of distinction and those who in the council's opinion have rendered eminent service to the council's area.

Section 249(8) of the 1972 Act as amended provides that the admission of an honorary freeman or honorary freewoman must be by resolution made at a meeting of the full council specially convened for such purpose and passed by no less than two-thirds of the members of the council. Section 249(8) also requires "notice of the object of the meeting" to be given.

Commented [EJ1]: This section has been added to provide more information about the title

This confirms the need for the agenda with the public notice and summons to members in respect of the council meeting to itemise a motion to confer the title of honorary freeman or honorary freewoman.

Section 249(9) of the 1972 Act as amended provides that a local council may spend a reasonable sum as it thinks fit for the purpose of presenting an address or a casket containing an address to a person on whom it has conferred the title of honorary freeman or honorary freewoman.

Prior to the changes in the law, as set out above, some local councils, who want to honour local residents' notable service to their town or community or who achieved national fame, conferred the titles "honorary citizen" or "honorary townsman" or "honorary burgess". Given the express powers given by the 2009 Act to admit "honorary freemen" and "honorary freewomen" it will no longer be necessary or even possible for local councils to confer other titles.

Nomination Criteria

The following will be taken into account when consideration is given to granting the honour of Honorary Freeman (or Freewoman) of Okehampton:

1. Preference will be given to a person who performs in a voluntary capacity, but this should not preclude the honour being awarded to a person whose dedication and contribution is significantly above that expected for their occupation.
2. All nominees should have carried out their largely voluntary roles for a period of at least 20 years.
3. Nominees need not necessarily be resident within the Okehampton Town Council area.
4. Any nominated Town Councillor should have retired from the post.
5. The contribution to the community of Okehampton should involve one or more of the following:
 - a) A significant allocation of the person's time in serving members of the community for the improvement of their well-being.
 - b) The promotion, achievement and/or delivery of community services in which a real personal contribution has been made.
 - c) A contribution which is seen to stand above the contributions of most others.

Nomination Procedure

1. Nominations should be made in the strictest confidence without the nominee's knowledge. Any resident or elector of Okehampton may make a nomination but it must be sponsored by a Town Councillor.
2. Nominations must be made in writing to the Town Clerk and supported by evidence of the voluntary service provided by the individual to the community and any other examples of service which justifies the honour. On receipt of a nomination it will be circulated to all Councillors for confidential consideration at a meeting of full Council.
3. If Councillors are in agreement by resolution at a meeting of full Council that the nominee should be made an Honorary Freeman (or Freewoman) of Okehampton, the nominee will be invited to accept the honour. If agreed, the nomination will then be put before the Council and a formal vote taken, again in confidence.
4. No fewer than two-thirds (rounded up) of the Town Councillors must agree the nomination.
5. The decisions of the Council on all nominations are final.

Commented [EJ2]: Added for clarification of the process

Entitlement

Any person nominated may designate himself/herself Honorary Freeman (or Freewoman) of Okehampton. The award will normally be made at a full Council meeting. A scroll will be presented to the recipient.