

Agenda Item No:

Report To: Council

Date of Meeting: 29th February 2024

Report Title: Freedom of the Borough

Report Author: Chief Executive

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Ovenden (Leader of the Council)

Portfolio Holder for:



Summary:

The Council is asked to consider granting the Freedom of the Borough to Mrs Jo James OBE, former Chief Executive of the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, and Mr Gerry Clarkson CBE, former Leader of Ashford Borough Council.

This report explains the progress made by a small group of Officers, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, on the possible arrangements for the formal granting of the Freedom of the Borough including a suggested date for the ceremony, reception arrangements and the wording of the scrolls.

Key Decision: NO

Significantly

Affected Wards: None specifically.

Recommendations: **The Council resolves that:**

- (i) **in accordance with the provisions of Section 249(5) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council of the Borough of Ashford do confer Mrs Jo James OBE with the Freedom of the Borough of Ashford in recognition of her achievements and significant and eminent services rendered to the Borough; that the Common Seal of the Council be affixed to the Scroll recording such admission; and her name be entered in the Honorary Roll.**

NB: Pursuant to Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972 not less than two thirds of the Members present and voting at the meeting will have to support the motion if the Freedom of the Borough is to be granted.

- (ii) **in accordance with the provisions of Section 249(5) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council of the Borough of Ashford do confer Mr Gerry Clarkson CBE with the Freedom of the**

Borough of Ashford in recognition of his achievements and significant and eminent services rendered to the Borough; that the Common Seal of the Council be affixed to the Scroll recording such admission; and his name be entered in the Honorary Roll.

NB: Pursuant to Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972 not less than two thirds of the Members present and voting at the meeting will have to support the motion if the Freedom of the Borough is to be granted.

- (iii) The arrangements for the ceremony as set out within the report be noted.**
- (iv) It be noted that the Borough Council, in consultation with His Worshipful the Mayor, and the proposed recipients, have agreed that the formal ceremony be held in St Mary's Church, Ashford on 24th April 2024.**

**Policy Overview:
Financial
Implications:**

N/A

It is estimated that the cost of the Scrolls and Coins together with hosting and other arrangements will be a modest amount which will be met from reserves.

**Other Material
Implications:**

In the past Ashford Borough Council has awarded the Freedom of the Borough to the 133 Recovery Company REME, the Princess of Wales' Royal Regiment and to the Intelligence Corps and also to Mr Ernie Mexter and to the late Ferdi Lethert MBE.

**Exempt from
Publication:**

NO

**Background
Papers:**

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Freedom of the Borough

Introduction and Background

1. To ask the Council to consider granting the Freedom of the Borough to Mrs Jo James OBE, former Chief Executive of the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, and Mr Gerry Clarkson CBE, former Leader of Ashford Borough Council. This report presents the formal resolution for adoption and also advises of proposals in terms of the formal arrangements for the event.
2. Section 249(5) of the Local Government Act 1972 provides that “a District Council having the status of a Borough may, by resolution passed by not less than two thirds of the Members voting thereon at a meeting of the Council specially convened for the purpose with notice of the object, admit to be a Honorary Freeman of the ... Borough ... persons of distinction and persons who have, in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent service to the ... Borough.”
3. The Freedom of the Borough has been awarded by the Borough Council to the 133 Recovery Company REME, the Princess of Wales’ Royal Regiment, the Intelligence Corps, Mr Ernie Mexter and Ferdi Lethert MBE. The awarding of the Freedom of the Borough is the highest honour a Borough Council is able to grant and is a relatively rare occurrence. It is therefore considered that this would appropriately acknowledge the service and achievements of both individuals.
4. Both individuals will be well known to Members of this Council but a brief resume of each, and a summary of their achievements is detailed below: -

Mrs Jo James OBE

After working for the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce for 33 years, of which 15 have been as Chief Executive, Jo James retired in December 2023.

Under her control, the 33-strong team, who support businesses employing more than 50,000 people across the county, has established Kent Invicta as one of the leading chambers in the country.

Jo was awarded an OBE for her services to the Kent economy in 2019 and has been a strong ambassador for our local business community.

Mr Gerry Clarkson CBE

After a 30 career in the UK Fire Service, Mr Gerry Clarkson spent a further eight years as an Independent Member of the Kent Police Authority.

With a total of some 55 years of public service it is fair to say Mr Gerry Clarkson has certainly left his mark, especially on Ashford.

In May 2023 Cllr Clarkson stepped down as Leader of Ashford Borough Council having spent over 17 years with the authority and a decade as Leader.

Proposal

5. The report sets out the formal resolutions for adoption, which pursuant to Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972, not less than two thirds of the Members present and voting at the meeting will have to support if the Freedom of the Borough is to be granted.
6. The report also advises on the arrangements for the event, it being noted that it will take place on Wednesday 24th April 2024.

Current Position

7. The Chief Executive has convened a small working group of Officers to discuss the possible arrangements for the event. Issues discussed are set out under the headings shown below.

Venue for Ceremony and Reception

8. Given the Council's relationship with Revelation St Mary's, and the possibility of being able to incorporate some musical performances in to the ceremony, it is considered that the ceremony and reception should take at St Mary's Church, Ashford

Date of Event

9. In consultation with His Worshipful the Mayor, and the potential recipients, it has been agreed that 24th April 2024 would be suitable for holding the ceremony and reception.

Wording for the Resolution and Scroll

10. Officers examined the wording used on the Scroll for the Freedoms given to previous recipients and agreed that it would be appropriate for similar wording to be adopted for this occasion. It is therefore proposed that the following wording will be incorporated in the Scroll:

“That

Jo James MBE/Gerald Dawson Clarkson CBE

be conferred with the Freedom of the Borough of Ashford in recognition and appreciation of her long, distinguished and exemplary service to the said Borough and bringing it to regional and national prominence; that the Common Seal of the Council be affixed to the Scroll recording such conferment; and that the name of Mrs Jo James MBE/Mr Gerald Dawson Clarkson CBE be entered in the Roll of Honorary Freemen of the Borough.”

Guest List

11. It is suggested that the following list will form the basis for the official invitations to the event, and subject to the Council approving the appropriate resolution, arrangements will be made for the formal invitations to be sent.
- Personal guests of the recipients
 - Honorary Aldermen of Ashford Borough Council
 - Lord Lieutenant of Kent or his representative
 - MP
 - All Members of the Borough Council
 - The Council's Management Team

Consultation

12. The Leader of the Council and His Worshipful the Mayor have been consulted on the proposals and are in agreement with the ceremony being taken forward as detailed within this report.

Handling

13. Subject to the Council agreeing the resolution, Officers will make the appropriate arrangements for the ceremony and reception.

Portfolio Holder's Views

14. The Leader of the Council is supportive of the proposals within this report.

Contact and Email

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