

Honorary Aldermen

LEAD OFFICER: Tim Capper, Head of Democratic Services
REPORT AUTHOR: Neil White, Scrutiny Support Officer

Recommendation: the Committee is asked to consider the role of the Council's Honorary Aldermen as set out in Section 4 below and make recommendations, as appropriate, to Full Council.

1. BACKGROUND

The Committee has an item in its work plan to look at the role of the Council's Honorary Aldermen. This was as a result of a request from one of the Aldermen to the Chief Executive for this issue to be considered. A copy of a letter from David Gray giving more details is at Appendix "A".

2. LEGAL BASIS

Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972 allows a Council to confer the title Honorary Alderman on persons who have, in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent services to the Council as past members to that Council, but who are not then councillors of the Council.

Honorary Aldermen may attend and take part in civic ceremonies as invited but will not have the right to attend meetings of the Council etc. or to receive any allowances or payments under section 173 to 176 of the Local Government Act 1972.

3. CRITERIA

Copeland Borough Council currently has 5 Honorary Aldermen. The criteria for appointing them is the statutory one detailed above.

Exploration of other authorities has shown that an expanded criteria could be used for appointing Aldermen. For example, South Hams District Council criteria is:

- (a) the title may be conferred on persons who have, in the opinion of the Council, rendered "eminent services" to the Council as past Members, but who are no longer serving Members;
- (b) There shall be no specific definition of 'eminent services', it being left to the discretion of the Council at the time to assess and recognise any

individual's contribution to the activities of the Council and the wellbeing of the district of the South Hams;

- (c) Nominees would normally require a minimum period of 12 years past service as a Member of the Council.

4. ROLE

Civic Ceremonial. A Handbook, History and Guide for Mayors, Councillors and Officers by Paul Millward states that:

“Whilst Honorary Aldermen have no legal, social or royal precedence, they can be used to support the office of Mayor. Such people can be encouraged to attend en masse all civic ceremonial events when invited and can support the work of the Mayor's charity. Similarly, when invited they can provide valuable support in hosting receptions and promoting civic pride and the council.”

It is suggested that at Copeland the role of Honorary Aldermen follows the current practice at the council which has been in place for some time and is in line with this advice. This is that Aldermen are invited to attend at the Civic Sunday, Remembrance Sunday, the Annual General Meeting and the Mayor's Charity Evening/Ball.

In respect of the council's committee meetings it is suggested that the current practice be continued of Honorary Aldermen receiving agendas for council meetings and others on request. Aldermen can attend meetings in the same manner as for a member of the public but will have access to the members room at the Copeland Centre.

However, attendance at meetings as an Alderman does not convey any rights to participate in meetings, and also does not convey rights to attend meetings for exempt or confidential business. It is suggested that this arrangement should be confirmed for Honorary Aldermen of the Borough of Copeland.

It is worth noting that there are no officer resources allocated for helping the Honorary Aldermen although staff in members services have undertaken some administrative duties as referred to in David Gray's letter.

5. CONCLUSION

The work plan suggests that this matter should be subject to an investigation by a task and finish group. However the desk top research has shown that there is very little difference in how authorities see the role of

their Honorary Aldermen and it is felt that there is not enough work for a task and finish group to look at.

In light of this, the Committee are asked to consider this report and recommend accordingly on what the role of Honorary Aldermen should be at this council.

List of Appendices

Appendix "A" – Letter from Alderman David Gray dated 25 June 2008.

List of Background Documents

None