

Proposal form for items for consideration by Scrutiny Committee



Submitted by: Cllr Paul Millar

Date submitted: 18/10/2021

Item for Consideration: Convention on Appointments of Honorary Aldermen and Alderwomen

Expected outcome (i.e. new policy, new action, new partnership, review and/or scrutinise the performance of other public bodies or of the Council in relation to its policy objectives, performance targets and/or particular service areas):

Review of current policy, and creation of new policy

Priority for matter to be considered (please tick):

High (up to 3 months)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Medium (3 to 6 months)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Low (over 9 months)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Basis on which priority has been set:

The suggested item should be included in future programme(s) because: (please tick as appropriate)

a) It is a district level function over which the district has some control	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
b) It is a recently introduced policy, service area of activity which would be timely to review	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) It is a policy which has been running for some time and is due for review	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
d) It is a major proposal for change	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) It is an issue raised via complaints received	<input type="checkbox"/>
f) It is an area of public concern	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
g) It is an area of poor performance	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
h) It would be of benefit to residents of the district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Which of the Council's objectives does the issue address?: This is irrelevant.

Is there a deadline for the Council to make a decision? (If so, when and why?): As soon as possible.

Members are requested to provide information on the following:-

What do you wish to achieve from the review?:

Knowledge of the convention for nominating Honorary Aldermen and Alderwomen, and the recommendation to Council of a transparent protocol.

Are the desired outcomes likely to be achievable?: Yes

Will it change/increase efficiency and cost effectiveness?: These are irrelevant; it will improve the Council's reputation.

Additional information – an explanatory sentence or paragraph to be provided below to support each box which has been ticked:

a) The Local Government Act 1972 gives principal councils the power to confer the title of 'Honorary Alderman' or 'Honorary Alderwoman on persons who have, in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent services to the council as past members of that council, but are no longer members of the council. The Act does not specify how eminent services are defined, and this is left as a matter of local interpretation.

c) The Council does not appear to have ever had a written protocol on appointing these honours, so it appears to have been a situation that has been allowed to run for some time. The Humphreys case in my view demands a review.

f, g, h) The Humphreys case has been a major area of public concern. As an abstainer on the original motion to approve the nominations, members of the public have been in touch with me about the issue to express their dissatisfaction with and suspicion of the system. I have explained that I had no idea of the allegations against Humphreys at the time, but nevertheless I didn't feel that sufficient evidence had been given to new Councillors that he had given an 'eminent' service to the District. On the contrary, Councillors were simply presented with a list of Committees that the nominated Councillors had served on, as though these represented achievements. On their own, they don't. It stretches the law to provide a proposal to Councillors with no evidence of how these former Councillors had provided 'eminent' services to the District. In my view we need a much more robust protocol to where we possibly can prevent a further situation where an award is stripped or awarded to a former Councillor who at the time of nomination was being investigated for serious crimes. Was any senior officer of EDDC aware of the live investigation at the time the nominations were proposed? Was the then Leader of the Opposition aware of the investigation? In future, while no Councillor should step down from their role under a live investigation, it would surely be appropriate that no Councillor being investigated for serious offences be elevated to an honorary position. This could intimidate and cause distress victims, and given details revealed during the court case, may well have done here. More broadly, I am baffled as to why Aldermen and Alderwomen receive free car parking across the District. I see no moral or legal case for affording this generous privilege when our residents are faced with increasing tariffs. A new policy modelled on Maidstone Council would in my view prevent the appointment of political cronies, promote apolitical conduct which some current Aldermen and Alderwomen fail to honour, and ensure there are fewer nominations reserved for genuinely outstanding service to their community, like the nomination for Mark Williamson and Roger Giles respective. Residents of the District will benefit from the knowledge that we are removing any potential cronyism from our Council, and promoting honours for genuine hard work and dedicated public service.

Please can you return the completed form to Democratic Services via email to democraticservices@eastdevon.gov.uk.

MONITORING OFFICER COMMENTS

There is no reason why the Council cannot decide to review and adopt a new protocol around the expectations for the conferring of the title of Honorary Aldermen and Alderwomen or indeed its removal. Members should be mindful of the basic tenet of the English criminal justice system that a person is innocent until proven guilty. There is also the question of whether it would be known whether a person was under investigation for a serious offence so as to act as a bar to having the title conferred.

Date: 18th October 2021