

EXTRAORDINARY COUNCIL – 14 MAY 2013

FREEDOM OF THE COUNTY – 4624 SQUADRON, ROYAL AUXILIARY AIR FORCE, RAF BRIZE NORTON

Report by the Monitoring Officer

Background

1. Section 249(5) of the Local Government Act 1972 allows a Council to bestow the Freedom of its area on persons it considers deserving of the honour. This requires a resolution passed by not less than two thirds of the members voting on it at a meeting of the Council, specially convened for the purpose.
2. The honour can be conferred on anyone the Council considers to be:
 - (a) persons of distinction, and
 - (b) persons who have, in the opinion of the authority, rendered eminent services to that place or area.
3. No other qualifying terms are specified and so it is for the Council, on a case by case basis, to determine the distinction or eminent service it wishes to recognise.
4. On the recommendation of Group Leaders, Council is invited to confer the status of Freedom of the County on 4624 Squadron, Royal Auxiliary Air force, RAF Brize Norton. This is in recognition of over thirty years of distinguished service, demonstrating sacrifice and commitment to the defence of the realm, and for dedicated support to local charities and communities.

4624 Squadron, Royal Auxiliary Air Force

5. The Squadron was formed at RAF Brize Norton on 8 August 1982 and achieved Full Operational Capability in 1987. The Squadron has now celebrated its 30th Anniversary and in its fourth decade, the Squadron continues to evolve and grow. It now finds itself as the largest Royal Auxiliary Air Force Unit with a Part Time Volunteer Reserves Establishment of 256 personnel. 4624 Squadron personnel account for 23% of the trained output of the Royal Air Force Logistic Movements Trade and continue to play a vital part in meeting the requirements of Defence.
6. The Squadron endeavours to maintain a representation at many important ceremonial events and has supported a number of local charities along with several service-focused charities. An annex to this report contains an outline of the history, role and engagements of 4624 Squadron by Wing Commander Williams and Warrant Officer Searles.

Freedom of the County – the rights conferred

7. By tradition, the granting of the status of Honorary Freeman to a military unit, allows the unit to “march through the streets...with bayonets fixed, drums beating and colours flying” (Civic Ceremonial, A handbook, history and guide, Paul Millward). This could occur, for example, on ceremonial occasions.
8. Otherwise, the conferment generally entails the presentation of a scroll and casket and the holding of a reception to celebrate the award.

Scroll

9. Should Council agree to the conferment, a certificate of appointment containing the Council’s Coat of Arms and sealed with the Common Seal of the Oxfordshire County Council will be presented to the Squadron and witnessed by the Chairman and Chief Executive.
10. As is the fashion for conferring degrees, the scroll will be rolled and the Council will, of course, arrange for the certificate to be framed in due course.

Conferment

11. It is customary, after the passing of the resolution, for a newly admitted Freeman, to sign a Freeman’s Roll, his or her signature being witnessed by the Chairman or the Chief Executive. An opportunity is then given for the recipient to reply.

Reception and parade

12. At a future date, it would be the intention to mark the conferment with an appropriate event and parade.

Precedence

13. While the status of Honorary Freeman does not confer any rights to attend civic ceremonies (under Section 249(4)), unlike the conferment of Honorary Alderman status, the Council may extend such invitations in any case.
14. In such cases it is for the Council to specify the order of precedence. Following previous decisions, in relation to the precedence of Honorary Aldermen, and taking account of established custom, the precedence in this case would be: Chairman, Vice Chairman, then Past Chairmen (if any still serving as councillors), then Honorary Freemen, then Aldermen then Cabinet Member/Local Councillors.

RECOMMENDATION

15. ***On the recommendation of Group Leaders, Council is RECOMMENDED to grant the honour of Freedom of the County to 4624 Squadron of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force, RAF Brize Norton in recognition of over thirty years of distinguished service, demonstrating sacrifice and commitment to the defence of the realm, and for dedicated support to local charities and communities.***

PETER CLARK

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Background Papers: Civic Ceremonial, A handbook, history and guide. Paul Millward

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