



Committee report

Committee	EXTRA-ORDINARY COUNCIL
Date	17 JANUARY 2018
Title	FREEDOM OF THE ISLE OF WIGHT
Report of/to	HEAD OF LEGAL AND MONITORING OFFICER

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Under the Local Government Act 1972, councils can bestow the Honorary Freedom of the Borough to 'persons of distinction and any persons who have rendered eminent services to the Borough'.
2. The Honorary Freedom of the Isle of Wight is the highest distinction a local authority can bestow on an individual. This act requires that a special resolution conferring the Freedom of the Isle of Wight must be passed by two-thirds of members attending and eligible to vote.
3. It is proposed that Mary Ellis be bestowed with the Honorary Freedom of the Isle of Wight in recognition of her role in the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA) as a Pilot during the Second World War and her role at Sandown Airport.

BACKGROUND

4. Mary Ellis, who celebrated her 100th birthday earlier this year, is the last surviving pilot of the Air Transport Auxiliary. The ATA ferried aircraft and pilots all over the country throughout the Second World War until the service was disbanded in 1945. Mary Ellis flew about 1,000 planes, some 76 types of aircraft, including some 400 Spitfires and 47 Wellington bombers which she flew solo, equipped only with a compass, a stopwatch and a map to navigate with.
5. Mary learnt to fly at the age of 16 and later heard an appeal by radio for women pilots, applied and was accepted into the ATA ranks.
6. After the War Mary moved to the Island initially working as a private pilot and then from 1950 to 1970 as the Managing Director, Operations and Commercial Manager at what is now known as Sandown Airport.
7. To boost business and to encourage women to fly Mary started the Isle of Wight Aero Club, a place where women were welcomed to learn to fly.

FINANCIAL / BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

8. The costs of convening the extraordinary meeting and any associated costs relating to the consideration of bestowing the Freedom will be met from within existing Democratic Services budgets.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9. Section 249 Local Government Act 1972 empowers a local authority to confer the "Freedom of the Borough" (referred to in this report as the "Freedom of the Isle of Wight") to a person of distinction, or a person who has rendered eminent services to the Borough.
10. The Freedom of the Borough is the highest honour that the council can grant and it should be used sparingly and awarded on merit to exceptional persons.
11. Conferring the Freedom of the Isle of Wight does not grant the title holder to any privileges, legal rights or responsibilities.
12. Many authorities put in place a protocol to provide clear guidance as to the criteria to be met and a nomination process. It is proposed that such a protocol be put in place in the future. This will be agreed with the chairman of the council and the group leaders.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

13. The council, as a public body, is required to meet its statutory obligations under the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to eliminate unlawful discrimination, promote equal opportunities between people from different groups and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it. The protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. No adverse impact arises from this report.

OPTIONS

14. (a) To confer the Freedom of the Isle of Wight on Mary Ellis in recognition that she is a person of distinction who, during the second World War as a pilot with the ATA flew more than 1,000 planes including Spitfires and Wellington bombers and who after the war, went on to start the Isle of Wight Aero Club and became Commandant of Sandown Airport.
15. (b) Not to confer the Freedom of the Isle of Wight on Mary Ellis.

RISK MANAGEMENT

16. The granting of the Freedom of the Isle of Wight must be to someone who meets the criteria, ie a person of distinction, or who has provided eminent services to the area. To award the Freedom without applying the criteria will result in the honour being devalued. As indicated in the report, this is the highest honour the council can grant. The report sets out how Mary Ellis meets the criteria.

RECOMMENDATION

17. To confer the Freedom of the Isle of Wight on Mary Ellis in recognition that she is a person of distinction who, during WWII as a pilot with the ATA flew more than 1,000 planes including Spitfires and Wellington bombers and who after the war, became Commandant of Sandown Airport.

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