

Brighton & Hove City Council

Special Council

Agenda Item 11

Subject: Honorary Freedom of the City

Date of meeting: 14 December 2023

Report of: Chief Executive

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Ward(s) affected: All

For general release

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

1.1 This report recommends that the Council confers the title of Honorary Freewoman of the City on Mary Clarke.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That the Council admits Mary Clarke to be an Honorary Freewoman of the City of Brighton & Hove posthumously.

3. Context and background information

3.1 The title of Honorary Freewoman or Freeman is awarded to people who have, in the opinion of the council, rendered eminent service to the council or the city.

3.2 Mary Jane Clarke was a vital figure in the women's suffrage movement in the UK and our city, tirelessly campaigning for women's right to vote.

3.3 She was a co-founder of the National Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) with her older sister Emmeline Pankhurst and served as its organiser for Brighton from 1909 to 1910.

3.4 During her time in Brighton, she helped build the WSPU operation in the southeast and organise the campaigns for the general election, often addressing crowds of supporters on the seafront.

3.5 She was one of the 300 women to demonstrate outside the Houses of Parliament during what is now known as 'Black Friday', where she was injured and beaten by the police.

3.6 Throughout years of campaigning, she was a target of heckling and abuse. She was arrested 3 times and, in Holloway Prison, was subjected to force feeding – a cruel practice inflicted upon those on hunger strikes.

- 3.7 She died on Christmas Day in 1910, 2 days after her release from Holloway. Mary is widely believed to be the first suffragette to die for women's right to vote.
- 3.8 This proposal will recognise her legacy, sacrifice and extraordinary courage with a Freedom of the City award, so that they don't remain overlooked and hidden in history.
- 3.9 With the removal of the honorary title of freewoman from Aung San Suu Kyi, Mary Clarke will be the first woman recipient of the title since the authority was created in 1997.

4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

- 4.1 The Council has not adopted alternative options for the recognition of services or significant contributions to the city other than conferring the Freedom of the City.

5. Community engagement and consultation

- 5.1 The Leaders of the Political Groups in the Council were consulted about the proposal at their meeting on 6 September 2023.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The conferral of the honour of Freedom of the city is for the council to determine. Given her contribution to women's rights and her local connection, it is recommended that the Council awards the title to Mary Clarke.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 There are no direct financial implications. The costs arising from the award of this title is expected to be met from within existing resources.

Name of finance officer consulted: Ishemupenyu Chagonda Date consulted: 06.12.2023

8. Legal implications

- 8.1 Section 249 (5) The Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009) enables the councils of cities to confer the status of honorary freeman/freewoman on "(a) persons of distinction and (b) persons who have, in the opinion of the council, rendered eminent services to the local area". The award of the title of Honorary Freeman has to be done by a resolution passed by not less than two-thirds of the Members voting at a meeting of the council specially convened for the purpose. The Freedom of the City does not confer rights other than to attend formal Council meetings.

Name of lawyer consulted: Abraham Ghebre-Ghiorghis Date consulted: 06.12.2023

9. Equalities implications

Freedom of the City is a civic honour that can be granted by the Council on deserving recipients and is used sparingly to maintain the significance of the award. The award of the title to Mary Clarke recognises her contribution to the struggle for women's equality and sends an important signal in underlining the Council's values of equality and inclusion. The way the Freedom of the City has been awarded historically may not have been as open and inclusive as it should be. It is therefore proposed to review the arrangements for the future to make them more inclusive and transparent.

10. Sustainability implications

10.1 There are no sustainability implications arising from the report.

11. Other Implications

11.1 There are no other significant implications arising from the report.

