



## **SPECIAL COUNCIL**

**24 JANUARY 2019**

### **CONFERMENT OF HONORARY FREEDOM TO HMS MEDWAY**

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Alan Jarrett, Leader  
Report from: Perry Holmes, Chief Legal Officer  
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#### **Summary**

This report has been prepared at the request of the Leader and invites the Council to consider a proposal to confer the honorary freedom of the borough on the Commanding Officer and Ship's Company of HMS Medway.

#### **1. Budget and Policy Framework**

1.1 The conferring of honorary freedom of the borough is a matter for Council.

#### **2. Background**

2.1 The honorary freedom of the borough is the highest civic distinction that can be conferred upon individuals or collective bodies in recognition of outstanding service or particular civic association, ensuring that their memory is maintained within the community.

2.2 Entry to the roll of freedom is usually accompanied by the presentation to the recipient of a scroll embodying details of the formal Council resolution.

2.3 The power to award honorary freedom of the borough is contained in the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009). Section 249 of that Act requires that an appropriate resolution is passed by not less than two thirds of the members voting thereon at a meeting of the Council specially convened for the purpose. Those awarded honorary freedom are required to be persons of distinction or persons who have, in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent services to the borough.

### **3. History of HMS Medway and contribution to the life of Medway**

- 3.1 Our armed forces act in the highest traditions of our country in the conduct of their operations.
- 3.2 The Royal Navy has an important place in the heart and memories of everyone in Medway. The historic links date back to the first recorded use by the Navy of the River Medway in 1547 and reached their peak with establishment of the Dockyard in Chatham.
- 3.3 There have been 10 ships and ashore establishments of the Royal Navy named HMS Medway after the River Medway. They have all participated in a variety of military scenarios and their crews have shown their bravery and determination. The earliest was a 60 gun fourth rate ship launched at Sheerness in 1693 under the direction of Master Shipwrights Daniel Furzer and Zachariah Modbury, the former was later appointed Master Shipwright at Chatham Dockyard. The ship was involved in the capture of several French privateers and had an exceptional record of taking prizes – 23 vessels between 1701 and 1712. Subsequently, there were three other 60 gun fourth rate ships named HMS Medway launched in 1718, 1742 and 1755 with the latter earning her first battle honour as part of the fleet that took Quebec in 1759; it then underwent a ‘great repair’ at Chatham Dockyard, and was re-commissioned in 1774 as flagship for Rear-Admiral. Robert Man where it earned its second battle honours while escorting a convoy bound for the West Indies in 1781.
- 3.4 Briefly, a fifth vessel was named HMS Medway. A fishing buss served in coastal water and Sheerness Dockyard between 1756 and 1764. After a gap of several years, a 74 gun third rate ship was launched in 1812 and was briefly flagship for Rear-Admiral Charles Tyler who was one of Nelson’s Band of Brothers as he referred to the captains under his command. In 1814 it captured the USS Syren after an 11 hour chase and was eventually converted in 1847 to a prison ship in Bermuda.
- 3.5 The seventh HMS Medway was an iron screw gunboat built in 1876 and was designed to operate inshore or rivers, mainly as a tender. The eighth ship was an M class destroyer that saw active service at Heligoland Bight during WWI and then escorted convoys until being sold in 1921.
- 3.6 In 1928, the Navy’s first purpose built F25 submarine depot ship was named HMS Medway which served at China station before World War II and then transferred to Egypt in 1940, supporting the submarine flotilla around Alexandria. Unfortunately, it was destroyed by a German submarine on the way to Lebanon with 30 men lost one of whom was Petty Officer Harold Penfold who was born in Kent and it is understood lived in Gillingham.
- 3.7 Between 1959 and 1970 HMS Medway was a submarine depot ship formerly Lancing Craft Tank HMS LCT1109.

- 3.8 In 2017 the Royal Navy launched a Batch 2 River-class offshore patrol vessel named HMS Medway. The 11<sup>th</sup> to hold that title. It was built in Scotstoun on the River Clyde and the Worshipful the Mayor of Medway at the time, Councillor David Wildey was pleased to represent the Council at the naming ceremony. The vessel is designed to be deployed globally, conducting anti-piracy, counter-terrorism and anti-smuggling tasks.
- 3.9 Also in 2017, the Royal Navy established a Royal Navy Reserve Unit at Fort Clarence, Rochester for reservists from the Medway Tender, a sub-unit of the London-based HMS President. It comprises state of the art classrooms and training facilities and shares accommodation and sporting facilities with their Army Reserve counterparts.
- 3.10 At the Council meeting on 25 January 2018, the Council agreed a motion confirming its intention to award the freedom of the borough to the Captain and Ship's Company and noting and supporting the use and display of the Council's motto - 'Forward Together' by the Commanding Officer as a prominent and lasting reminder of our affiliation.
- 3.11 On behalf of the people of Medway, the Council now wishes to cement and foster the close and longstanding bonds of friendship and mutual respect between the Royal Navy as well as express admiration at the bravery, endurance and commitment of the servicemen and women of HMS Medway in particular. The Council is therefore minded to formally decide to grant the Freedom of Medway to the Commanding Officer and Ship's Company of HMS Medway in recognition of the eminent services the men and women of the Ship's Company have made and will continue to make to Medway.
- 3.12 If approved, it is the intention to hold a Freedom Parade and a ceremony for the formal presentation of the Freedom scroll at a date yet to be confirmed.

#### **4. Risk management**

- 4.1 There are no risk management implications arising from this report.

#### **5. Financial implications**

- 5.1 Costs of in the region of £16,000 are likely to be incurred relating to the proposed Freedom March and the preparation of a scroll setting out the resolution of the Council plus the casket in which it will be presented to the Commanding Officer. Depending on the date of the Freedom Parade and ceremony these costs could fall in the financial year 2018-19 or 2019-20.
- 5.2 Provision of £6,000 will also need to be made annually, in case the Ship's Company wish to exercise their right to march, with fixed bayonets, through the borough. This will start from and include the financial year 2019-20.
- 5.3 A budget provision of £21,000 was initially allowed for in the 2018/19 Budget at Full Council on 22/02/18 within the Festival, Arts, Theatres and Events Division. However, if the Freedom Parade and Ceremony subsequently takes place in 2019/20 this budget allocation will be rolled forward to facilitate this event.

## **6. Legal implications**

- 6.1 The power to confer the honorary freedom of the borough of Medway on persons of distinction or persons who have, in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent services to the borough, is contained within section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009). Section 249 of the Act also empowers the Council to spend a reasonable sum for the purpose of presenting an address or casket to a person upon whom the honorary freedom of the borough has been conferred.

## **7. Recommendation**

- 7.1 That, in pursuance of the power vested in it by virtue of section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the Council consider whether to agree to confer the honorary freedom of the borough on the Commanding Officer and the Ship's Company of HMS Medway from time to time, in perpetuity, in the interests of cementing and fostering the close and longstanding bonds of friendship and mutual respect existing between the Company, Medway Council and the people of Medway.

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### **Appendices**

None

### **Background papers**

None