

## **SPECIAL COUNCIL**

**19 OCTOBER 2023**

### **CONFERMENT OF HONORARY FREEDOM OF THE BOROUGH TO MEDWAY NHS FOUNDATION TRUST**

Report from: Richard Hicks, Chief Executive

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#### Summary

This report has been prepared at the request of the Leader of the Council and invites the Council to consider a proposal to confer the honorary freedom of the borough on the Medway NHS Foundation Trust on behalf of the staff at Medway Maritime Hospital. The conferment is in recognition of the contribution of the staff to the community, particularly as 2023 is the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the National Health Service (NHS).

#### 1. Recommendation

1.1 That, in pursuance of the power vested in it by virtue of section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the Council agree to confer the honorary freedom of the borough on the Medway NHS Foundation Trust on behalf of the staff of Medway Maritime Hospital, from time to time, and indefinitely, in the interests of cementing and fostering the close and longstanding bonds of friendship and mutual respect existing between the Medway Maritime Hospital and its workforce, Medway Council and the people of Medway as well as express admiration at the workforce's contribution to the National Health Service.

#### 2. Budget and policy framework

2.1 This is a matter for Council.

2.2 The Council meeting held on 20 July 2023, agreed to convene a Special meeting of the Council on 19 October 2023 to consider a proposal to grant the freedom of Medway to the Medway NHS Foundation Trust on behalf of the staff at Medway Maritime Hospital. (minute no. 138/2023 refers).

- 2.3 The Festival and Events team hold a small budget for supporting Freedom and Remembrance Day events across Medway.
- 2.4 Due to escalating costs of event infrastructure and service, any new events added to the current schedule may require additional budget. This will be reviewed on an annual basis.

### 3. Background

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 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.

### 4. History of Medway Maritime Hospital and contribution to the life of Medway

- 4.1 In 1827 the Melville Hospital was built just outside the Chatham Dockyard gates to provide hospital care to the Royal Navy in recognition of the significant numbers of people attracted to Chatham as a result of the Dockyard. The expansion of the Royal Navy as a result of the threat of war created increasing overcrowding at the Melville hospital. In July 1905, King Edward VII opened The Medway Hospital which was larger and had been built near the top of Chatham Hill, where it was isolated from the fumes and smoke of the Dockyard and cement works.
- 4.2 The new hospital consisted of six blocks or pavilions, and patients had access to balconies or verandas if the weather was fine. Standing guard above the hospital was the clock tower which was and remains a local landmark, standing 130 feet tall. It mimics the tower in St Marks Square in Venice and is echoed in the smaller water tower which is a Grade 2 listed building that stands 117 feet tall.
- 4.3 Many casualties were treated at the hospital during World War I, including 16 of the people rescued from the HMS Bulwark tragedy in November 1917. Members are probably aware that the ship was blown apart by an explosion and that of the 750 men on board, only 16 were rescued but seven subsequently died. Similarly, in September 1917, German bombers dropped

50kg bombs on the Drill Hall at Chatham Dockyard in which around 900 men were inside, most of them asleep. As well as people being killed outright, the shattered glass roof severed limbs and heads. This became known as the worst incident on UK soil during WW1, and it was noted that admissions for psychological disorders at the hospital rose steadily through WW1.

- 4.4 When World War II was called, the list of medical staff had increased, but high numbers of men were joining the service and many staff were sent to war. German bombers hit Block A, making it structurally unsafe but it was converted at a later date and ultimately demolished as part of rebuilding in the 1980's.
- 4.5 As a result of complaints made by the people of Medway and Swale that there was a shortage of beds for acutely ill patients, the Minister of Health responded that the Royal Navy hospital would become available in 1961 under the aegis of the National Health Service (NHS). It was transferred to the care of the Medway Health Authority, closed for a £1.5m modernisation scheme and re-opened in 1965. The last service at St Luke's Church was the official ceremony of closure held in January 1961 after which the Royal Navy marched with a full parade led by a brass band through the gates for the last time.
- 4.6 Significant work that followed includes:
- the creation of a new orthopaedic block and accident and emergency centre in 1970.
  - a new extension for elderly and mental health services (A Block) in 1990.
  - a new £60 million development which saw the hospital double in size in 1999 when services provided at neighbouring hospitals in Rochester (St Bartholomew's) and Chatham (All Saints') were brought under the umbrella of Medway Hospital.
  - the hospital changed its name in 1999 to mark the start of a new era. The new name 'Medway Maritime Hospital' reflected the hospital's proud naval tradition.
- 4.7 Medway Maritime Hospital is now operated by the Medway NHS Foundation Trust which serves a population of more than 424,000 across Medway and Swale. It provides clinical services to almost half a million patients a year, including 133,000 Emergency Department attendees, more than 75,000 admissions, more than 278,000 outpatient appointments and around 5000 babies born each year.
- 4.8 The Trust employs around 1,300 registered nurses, 600 doctors, and 4,100 employees, making it one of the Medway's largest employers and close to 400 volunteers who provide support across the League of friends, Hospital Radio and the Voluntary Services Department.
- 4.9 As well as providing the services outlined in paragraph 4.7 above, the Trust has been recognised on several occasions recently for innovation and continual improvement:

- it was named as South East regional winner at the NHS Parliamentary Awards 2023 in the 'Excellence in Urgent and Emergency Care' category for a project to improve the care of deteriorating patients.
- it has been accredited as Veterans Aware recognising the Trust's commitment to the armed forces community whose history it shares.
- A £1.4m makeover of Keats ward to enhance care for frail patients and provide a clinically suitable and comfortable environment for acute inpatient care and treatment.

4.10 In recent years the Trust has faced various challenges, which staff have faced with courage, commitment and compassion, with a stated desire to provide the best of care to the patients they serve.

4.11 When the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in early 2020 the Trust rose to this new and unprecedented situation, quickly adapting to the evolving picture and responding to national directives and guidance to keep patients and staff safe. Face masks and other forms of personal protective equipment, hand gel and social distancing were introduced, and visiting limited. Staff continued to provide care in these difficult circumstances, often needing to isolate from their own families in order to prioritise the care of patients. For those in the critical care unit and respiratory wards, shifts were often physically and emotionally draining. Initiatives such as Messages for Loved Ones and Skype Angels helped people keep in touch with relatives in hospital when visiting wasn't possible.

4.12 The Trust lost some of its own staff to COVID-19, which was particularly tough for colleagues.

4.13 As we all learnt to 'live with Covid' the hospital has adapted further, with restrictions lifted, and a focus on addressing longer waits for surgery and outpatients that developed during the pandemic. Patients have expressed their thanks in many ways to the staff who continued to care throughout those challenging times, and the Trust has paid tribute to patients for their understanding and support.

## 5. Formal presentation of Freedom

5.1 If approved, it is the intention to hold a ceremony in conjunction with the Trust for the formal presentation of the Freedom scroll at a date to be determined.

## 6. Risk management

6.1 There are no risk management implication arising from this report.

## 7. Financial implications

- 7.1 It is expected that the costs relating to the proposed event for the formal presentation and the preparation of a scroll setting out the resolution of the Council would be up to £5000. These costs are likely to fall in the current financial year. The existing budget for ceremonial events has already been fully committed for 2023/24. This event would therefore represent a small pressure on the revenue budget.
- 7.2 Conferment of freedom of the borough allows the recipient the opportunity to exercise their right to march through the Borough, however, the likelihood of this happening in respect of the Medway NHS Foundation trust is unlikely. The cost of a freedom parade is around £11,500, and any costs incurred would also represent as additional pressure on the revenue budget.

## 8. Legal implications

- 8.1 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.

**Note:** this resolution must be passed by not less than two-thirds of the members voting thereon to take effect, in accordance with section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

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### Appendices

None

### Background papers

None