

Committee(s) Freedom Applications Committee	Date(s): 18 November 2021
Subject: Proposed Merger of Freedom by Special Nomination and Freedom by Invitation Categories of Freedom	Private
Report of: Chamberlain	For Decision
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NOT FOR PUBLICATION

This report is exempt by virtue of the paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. Specifically, paragraphs of the report contain sensitive information which may be exempted under the Act, and as this cannot be presented to Members as a separate appendix this report needs to be considered in closed session. It is considered that information falling under the following paragraphs outweighs the public interest in disclosing information:

1)	Information relating to any individual
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Summary

1. The Committee previously agreed that there is some confusion about the two "special" categories of freedom, namely Freedom by Special Nomination (FSN) and Freedom by Invitation (FBI). The distinction needs clarifying and consideration be given to merging the two categories.

Recommendations

that the Freedom Applications Committee:

- i) consider the current distinction between the two categories, as set out below, and agree retain them as two separate categories;
or
- ii) agree to merge the Freedom by Special Nomination (FSN) and Freedom by Invitation (FBI) into one category.

Background

2. In 2015 the previous system of VIP Freedoms was replaced by a new category of Freedom by Special Nomination. The old system was random and somewhat haphazard with no clarity as to who was eligible and without regard to cost implications regarding waiving of fees and the provision of hospitality.

However, it was agreed that the freedom was a valuable asset in regard to soft power, influence and positive publicity for the City of London.

3. FSNs are considered by the recipient to be an honour and more significant than a normal Freedom by Redemption or those which relate to Freemen of the 110 Livery Companies seeking City Freedom to enable them to become Liverymen. A number of factors differentiate them:
 - The Ceremony is conducted by the Chamberlain or Remembrancer;
 - The nomination is usually made by senior members (the Lord Mayor, Sheriffs, the Chief Commoner, the Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee, the Chair of the Freedoms Application Committee) and they attend the Ceremony;
 - Recipients receive a special framed copy of their freedom certificate, which is a different shape and partially illuminated with gold effect trim
 - Recipients and their guests receive hospitality in the form of a post-ceremonial lunch or dinner in one of the private dining rooms at Guildhall (the Chief Commoner's Parlour, the members' Private Dining Room, the Aldermen's Dining Room) or occasionally at the Mansion House;
 - The recipient sometimes participates in a Q & A session attended by pupils from our family of schools, members and staff and students from GSMD.
4. FSNs have typically been awarded 3 or 4 times a year since their introduction. They are received extremely well by those who are nominated, and the City Corporation has benefitted from the positive publicity associated with the awards.
5. Although similar to FSNs in that no fee is payable by the recipient and the ceremony is normally accompanied by hospitality, FBIs have developed in parallel to FSNs and are intended to recognise the wider pool of individuals that the City Corporation may wish to connect with. Nominations come from both members and officers, and candidates are drawn from across the City's interests/spheres of influence within which the COL operates: culture, politics, diplomacy, the financial City, military, educational, etc. They are still regarded by the individual as a mark of recognition.
6. The Deputy Chairman previously defined an FSN as less rare than the Honorary Freedom. and, normally, based on the personal achievements of the individual. The FBI on the other hand is when the City might want to award the Freedom for a particular reason to enhance a working relationship, but not based solely on individual merit. It is possible that some individuals may not necessarily be comfortable being celebrated in the way an FSN might suggest, but are comfortable to have the recognition that is attached to an FBI.

Options

7. Should members agree that the distinction between FSNs and FBIs is clear enough, then the practice of having both options available could continue.

This will allow the Chamberlain's Court to make use of the separate certificates it has purchased for FSNs. It is possible however that those members and officers less familiar with the Freedom will continue to confuse the two categories.

8. Should members wish to merge FBIs and FSNs, it is suggested this is achieved by abolishing FSNs as a separate category, and continuing with FBIs. This would help to provide clarification for members and officers wishing to propose distinguished individuals for the Freedom. It would also not prevent the City Corporation from being able to offer an enhanced experience to such individuals including high level hospitality and the offer to participate in a Q&A where appropriate.

Conclusions

9. Members are asked to consider whether to pursue either of the options outlined above.
10. The Chamberlain's Court has an existing budget for FSNs, both for the hospitality and for the ancillary costs, for example, 100 frames and 100 gold finished parchments were purchased in 2015. This was a bulk purchase to ensure value for money. Should the Committee take the decision to merge the two categories, it is suggested that the budget for hospitality be retained but that the stock of frames and parchments be used over a period of time (for the most prominent of the FBIs) and there then would not be replaced.

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