

**THE BOROUGH COUNCIL OF NEWCASTLE UNDER LYME**  
**EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAMS REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL**

**Date: 27<sup>th</sup> November 2013**

**Appointment of Town Crier**

**Submitted by: Chief Executive – John Sellgren**

**Portfolio: Communications, Transformations and Partnerships**

**Ward(s) affected: All**

**Purpose of the Report**

To consider the appointment of a Town Crier for Newcastle-under-Lyme Town.

**Recommendations**

That the Council appoints Gordon Brayford as the Town Crier for Newcastle-under-Lyme Town on a voluntary basis on the terms contained in the report.

**Reasons**

Should it be considered appropriate the Council may either appoint or give its approval to the appointment of a Town Crier if he is to be managed by another organisation.

1. **Background**

In 1590 Elizabeth I (in what was the largest on Newcastle Towns Charters) re-confirmed the privileges already held by the Town in the Charter of Incorporation. Previous Charters were confirmed and ancient customs ratified such as the established form of local government consisting of the Mayor, two bailiffs and twenty four “assistants” or capital burgesses. New privileges included the “incorporation” of the town and the method by which certain elections were held.

The Charter also appeared to have stimulated the appointment of a supervisor to oversee and regulate all of the Towns markets. The official appointed to this task was the Bellman or Town Crier.

Subsequently, the Town Crier was authorised to collect toll on all corn and grain bought for sale in the town and retain it for his own use. For this privilege he had to pay a toll to the Towns Muniment chest.

In 1670 the Council decided to appoint a common scavenger to, amongst other things, cart away the town’s refuse but none filled the office until 1682. It was not until 1723 that the Town Crier was made responsible for cleansing the streets. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, filth and rubbish was still being dumped in the streets and alleyways.

The Town Crier or Bellman was also an officer of the court who made public pronouncements as required by the court and to make public announcements in the streets. Criers, by tradition dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century dressed elaborately and carried a hand-bell to attract peoples' attention by shouting the well known works "Oyez Oyez Oyez!" before making public announcements which was a call for silence and attention.

Historically only Councils, the church and the Lord of the Manor could appoint a Town Crier or, with their approval and consent, another organisation could employ one.

When the need for a Town Crier disappeared the position passed into folklore.

Informal and later formal Town Crier competitions were held from the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century and subsequently some cities and towns reinstated the post purely for ceremonial purposes.

## 2. **Issues**

- 2.1 On the 12<sup>th</sup> September the Newcastle Town Centre Partnership advertised a competition for a Town Crier to be held on 21<sup>st</sup> September with demos from criers as far afield as Halifax.
- 2.2 Devlin Hobson (Kingsgrove Town Crier) judged the competitors for volume and clarity – "to be heard as clear at 50 feet as two feet away and to maintain a constant volume throughout the proclamation and not to let the voice trail off to a low volume"
- 2.3 Adrian Holmes (Sandwell Town Crier) judged confidence and bearing – "to be able to command attention from a large crowd and keep their attention".
- 2.4 Les Cutts (Halifax Town Crier) judged diction and inflection – "to be able to raise and lower the tone where needed in a proclamation".
- 2.5 Julie Cutts and Janet Parsons (Town Crier lady escorts) did the 'interrogation' of the contestants to find their views, commitment and thoughts of what being a town crier would involve.
- 2.6 The overall winner of the competition was Gordon Brayford who maintained in the "cry off" a strong and clear voice with no interruption or faltering of the voice. The "news" was read smoothly and one hundred per cent correct.
- 2.7 On the 11 October, Matt Taylor (the Town Centre Manager) met with the Civic Society who agreed to liaise with the Nantwich Town Crier with a view to the provision of the necessary regalia for the Town Crier, should one be appointed by the Council.
- 2.8 Both the Town Centre Partnership and the Civic Society considered that as the Council will wish to make use of a Town Crier for civil engagements then he would be best managed by the Borough Council.
- 2.9 It is permissible for the Borough Council to appoint a Town Crier and - should it be minded to do so - it is considered that, as the civil engagements will be limited, the Borough Council's most suitable and flexible option would be for the Town Crier to remain self employed and for the Council to enter into a contract for services with him for him in order to undertake official functions as and when required, subject to all approved expenses being reimbursed. This would leave him free to advertise his services for public weddings, openings etc; from which he would be able to derive additional income.

3. **Outcomes Linked to Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities**

Creating a Borough of Opportunity

Local people are able to access opportunities for personal development and growth

4. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

Only those contained in the report.

5. **Equality Impact Assessment**

No issues have been identified

6. **Financial and Resource Implications**

If a Town Crier is appointed as referred to and a contract for services entered into with him it would be reasonable to reimburse expenses. This is quite normal in such appointments. Consideration may also need to be given as to who maintains and repairs the Town Crier's regalia in the future.

7. **Major Risks**

None identified

8. **Key Decision Information**

This is not a key decision and was not included in the forward plan.