

Agenda item 7(ii)

Council Meeting 15 July 2015

Background Information for Council on the Office of High Steward of Colchester

This note provides further information for Council following the report to Governance Committee on 30 June 2015 (minute 3 refers) on the appointment of a new High Steward.

1.0 The office of High Steward of Colchester was created by virtue of a Royal Charter granted by King Charles I dated 9 July 1635, which was also the Charter that first gave the town a Mayor in place of two annually elected Bailiffs.

2.0 The Charter states that

"henceforth for ever there may and shall be in the borough aforesaid a High Steward to advise and direct the Mayor and Commonalty in the chief business touching that borough. Which High Steward indeed shall continue in the office of High Steward of the borough aforesaid during his natural life, unless in the meantime he should resign that office of his own free will."

3.0 The Charter goes on to state that after the death or resignation of a High Steward:-

"...at a time fitting.....it shall be rightfully lawful for the Mayor, Aldermen, Assistants, Common Council and Free Burgesses of the Commonalty of the Borough..... to choose and prefer one other as High Steward...."

4.0 The Municipal Corporations Act 1835 abolished most High Stewards and the Government only allowed Colchester's petition to retain a High Steward on condition that the wording contained on the Charter "...advise and direct..." be amended to "...advise...".

5.0 Accordingly the duties of the High Steward are:

"to advise the Mayor and Commonalty in the chief business touching the borough".

As the role is purely honorific it carries no formal responsibilities or powers.

6.0 Civic protocol states that the High Steward is given precedence after the Mayor.

7.0 The Local Government Act 1972 provides that:

- 7.1 an Honorary Alderman shall not while serving as a member of the council, be entitled to be addressed as Alderman or to attend or take part in any civic ceremonies of the council as an Alderman; and
- 7.2 An Honorary Alderman may attend and take part in such civic ceremonies as the council may from time to time decide, but shall not, as such, have the right to:-
- (a) attend meetings of the council or a committee of the council (including a joint committee upon which they are represented); or
 - (b) receive any allowances or other payments .
- 8.0 Council may wish to consider applying the same principles going forward to the post of High Steward as the law provides in relation to Honorary Aldermen as mentioned at paragraph 7.0.

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