

FOR PUBLICATION

AGENDA ITEM

FREEDOM OF THE BOROUGH; 575 SQUADRON (GD000)

MEETING: 1. CABINET
 2. LEAD MEMBER FOR GOVERNANCE AND
 ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

DATE: 1. 22nd MARCH, 2011
 2. 10th MARCH, 2011

REPORT BY: HEAD OF GOVERNANCE

WARD: ALL

COMMUNITY FORUM: ALL

FOR PUBLICATION

BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR PUBLIC REPORTS:

TITLE: Letter from CO LOCATION: File C. 71

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To consider a request from the 575 (Sherwood Forest) Field Squadron (Air Sp) (V) of the Territorial Army to be granted Freedom of Entry into the Borough.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 2011 will be the 50th anniversary of the formation of the 575 (SF) Field Squadron RE (V) as a Royal Engineers squadron based at Boythorpe Road Drill Hall. The squadron's history can be traced through the Royal Artillery via the Sherwood Foresters, from the formation of the Volunteer Force in 1861. 2011 will also be the year when several veterans from the 575 squadron return home from deployment in Afghanistan and Cyprus, working alongside their regular counterparts.

- 2.2 The Squadron's Commanding Officer believes that Freedom of Entry into the Borough would cement the relationship between the Borough Council and its local Territorial Army Unit. His letter, written on 1st September, 2010 is attached at Appendix A.
- 2.3 He states that granting Freedom of Entry would also raise the profile of the Territorial Army in Chesterfield, and would mark the commitment and sacrifices men and women from the Borough have made and continue to make in support of the Armed Forces on current operations.

3.0 **FREEDOM OF ENTRY INTO THE BOROUGH**

- 3.1 Under the Council Constitution (Civic and Ceremonial) the Council has the power to confer on any person or persons the title of honorary alderman, or to admit any person or persons to be honorary freemen (Section 249 of the 1972 Local Government Act). The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 Chapter 5 (Section 29) amended Section 249 of the Local Government Act to permit the creation of honorary freewomen and alderwomen as well as freemen and aldermen.
- 3.2 Associated with this 'Freedom of the Borough' is the 'Freedom of Entry' which has been granted by a number of cities and boroughs to service units which have rendered conspicuous service and which are closely associated with the city or borough. This freedom includes the privilege, honour and distinction of marching through the streets of the town or city on all ceremonial occasions with bayonets fixed, drums beating and colours flying.
- 3.3 Although the freedom of entry is not specifically mentioned in the Local Government Act, or the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act, the practice has become generally accepted and provides a dignified and satisfactory means of enabling a city or borough to honour a distinguished unit of the armed forces.
- 3.4 In 2007 the Mercian Regiment was given Freedom of Entry into the Borough (Minute No. 0059 (2007/8)). This was an

extension of the Freedom of Entry granted to its predecessor regiments: The Sherwood Foresters in 1946 and then in 1970, following a merger, the Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment.

- 3.5 When the Mercian Regiment exercised its Freedom of Entry into the Borough in 2008, the regiment marched through the town and received the framed Freedom scroll outside the Town Hall. A reception was held for members of the regiment, and family members of those who had been recruited locally. Representatives of ex-service organisations and of the Territorial Army were also invited to attend. The estimated cost of the Freedom scroll and reception was £800, and costs were covered from savings made elsewhere in the civic budget.

4.0 **THE HISTORY OF THE 575 SQUADRON**

- 4.1 The links between the 575 Squadron and the Mercian Regiment's predecessors have changed over time. When the Territorial and Reserve Army Act (1908) came into force the volunteer battalion based in Chesterfield (A Company) became part of the 6th Battalion The Sherwood Foresters (Nottingham and Derbyshire Regiment). This battalion took part in the First World War, and after that war a Territorial Force re-formed in Chesterfield in 1919. In 1936 it was re-designated 40 (Sherwood Foresters) Anti-Aircraft Battalion Royal Artillery, and mobilised in 1939.
- 4.2 After demobilisation in 1946 the battalion was reformed as part of the Territorial Army. It subsequently went through several changes of name until 1969, when it received its present title 575 (Sherwood Foresters) Field Squadron (Air Support) (Volunteers) becoming part of the newly formed 73 Engineer Regiment (Volunteers).
- 4.3 It is on this basis that the 575 Squadron suggest that although they still have 'Sherwood Foresters' in their title, they have not been associated with the predecessors of the Mercian Regiment for over fifty years, and they are now associated with a different regiment. They are the only sub-unit of the Territorial Army in Derbyshire.

- 4.4 For this reason they believe that they are not included in the Freedom of Entry granted to the predecessors of the Mercian Regiment. A letter from the Commanding Officer of the 75 Engineer Regiment (Volunteers) giving reasons why the 575 Squadron is not included in the Mercian Freedom of Entry is attached at Appendix B. It states that although both the 575 Squadron and the Mercian Regiment both originated from the 6th Battalion The Sherwood Foresters, they had developed since 1936 in different directions, so that:

“We believe that 575 (SH) Fd Sqn (Air Sp) (V) do not hold the Freedom of Chesterfield.”

- 4.5 The Mercian Regiment made a similar statement in an email from the Administrative Officer at the RHQ Mercian, dated 17th December, 2010, attached at Appendix C:

“The Mercian Regiment view is that, as the 6th Battalion Sherwood Foresters converted from Infantry to Royal Engineers in 1936, and the Freedom was not granted to the Sherwood Foresters (Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment) until 1946, it cannot and does not apply to the 575 (Sherwood Foresters) Field Squadron (Air Support) (V).”

- 4.6 The 575 Squadron takes an active part in most Borough Council civic parades, including the parade to and from the Civic Service, and on Remembrance Day. This Squadron usually provides the Parade Commander on these occasions.
- 4.7 The current Defence Review may affect the future of local Territorial Army units. The Squadron Commanding Officer has suggested that the Borough Council reaffirms its commitment to the Unit and considers formally conferring Freedom of Entry once the future of the Unit is clarified.
- 4.8 If Freedom of Entry were granted, members of the 575 Squadron are expected to return from active service in Cyprus and Afghanistan in the autumn of 2011, and a weekend parade and reception to welcome them home in November would be an appropriate way to mark the

occasion, as well as celebrating the 50th anniversary of the unit.

5.0 **RISK MANAGEMENT**

5.1

Description of risk	Impact	Likelihood	Mitigating Action
Disbandment of the 575 Squadron before Freedom of Entry is granted	High	Unknown	Defer implementation of Freedom of Entry until Defence Review reports
Accidents or public order incidents during the parade	High	Low	Do detailed Risk Assessment, and plan parade with police assistance

5.2 There are no standard corporate issues relevant to this report.

6.0 **EQUALITIES CONSIDERATIONS**

6.1 A Preliminary Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken, and there is no disproportionate impact on any groups.

6.2 Granting Freedom of Entry into the Borough would benefit current members of the Territorial Army Unit, as well as former members, and young people joining the Unit as cadets.

7.0 **FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

7.1 It is estimated that the cost of a framed Freedom of Entry scroll, and a civic reception in the Town Hall at a weekend would be approximately £900.

7.2 It should be possible to cover the cost of this event from savings elsewhere in the civic budget, as with the Mercian Regiment Freedom of Entry, exercised in 2008.

7.3 It would be necessary to record the granting of Freedom of Entry on the boards in the Town Hall listing honorary

freemen. The estimated cost of the removal, transport and replacement of the board, and the lettering, would be approximately £250, to be covered from savings in the civic budget.

8.0 **RECOMMENDATION**

- 8.1 That the Borough Council reaffirms its support and commitment to the 575 (SF) Field Squadron (Air Sp) (V).
- 8.2 That further consideration be given to the granting Freedom of Entry into the Borough to the 575 (SF) Field Squadron (Air Sp) (V) at a meeting of the Council, once the future of the Unit has been clarified.

9.0 **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION**

- 9.1 To respond positively to the request from the Squadron.
- 9.2 To respond to Government support for closer links between the armed forces and local authorities in areas where they recruit, for mutual benefit.
- 9.3 To recognise the longstanding co-operation between the Squadron and the Borough Council during civic events.
- 9.4 To acknowledge the commitment and sacrifice made by men and women of the Borough in support of the Armed Forces.

S. GOODWIN
HEAD OF GOVERNANCE

Further information on this matter can be obtained from Mary Stead, Democratic Services Officer (Extension 5236).

Officer recommendation supported/not supported/modified as below or
Lead Members' recommendation/comments if no Officer recommendation.

Signed

Lead Member

Date

Consultee Lead Member/Support Member comments (if applicable)