



General Purposes Committee

Date:	1 November 2017
Classification:	For General Release
Title:	Freedom Rights – The Royal Yeomanry Regiment
Report of:	The Chief of Staff
Financial Summary:	See paragraph 5
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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report recommends conferring rights and honours on the Royal Yeomanry Regiment in recognition of the close association between them and the City over many years.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Council be recommended:
 1. In light of the Council's close association with the Royal Yeomanry, the Regiment be granted "the freedom and distinction of proceeding through the City on all ceremonial occasions in full panoply and, so far as appropriate, with drums beating, colours flying and bayonets fixed".
 2. An illuminated document under the Common Seal recording the grant of such privilege be prepared and presented to the officers and other ranks of the Royal Yeomanry.
 3. To note that sponsorship will be sought to cover the maximum cost of £15,000 of the illuminated document, the presentation ceremony and a reception to mark the occasion and if sufficient sponsorship is not forthcoming a report be submitted to the Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Corporate Services.

3. Background Information

Freedom of the City

- 3.1 It has been suggested that the Royal Yeomanry be granted the Freedom of the City of Westminster.
- 3.2 This is an honour conferred by a City Council on a military unit, allowing the unit the privilege of marching into the City “with drums beating, colours flying, and bayonets fixed”.
- 3.3 It is deeply appreciated by the Armed Forces. In practical terms, however, the honour confers no benefit, since ANY of HM Forces may march through the streets of Westminster.
- 3.4 In Westminster, it is customary for Freedom Honours to be made at a formal ceremony in Westminster Abbey and celebrated afterwards at a reception hosted by the City of Westminster. The unit granted the honour exercises its Freedom by marching from the Abbey, through the streets of Westminster, to the reception venue.
- 3.5 The Council has previously conferred Freedom of the City Honours upon HMS Westminster; the London Scottish Regiment; F Company, 7 Rifles; and the Westminster Dragoons.
- 3.6 Freedom of the City should not be confused with “Honorary Freedom”, which is bestowed on individuals under Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972,

The Westminster Dragoons and the Royal Yeomanry

- 3.7 The Westminster Dragoons was formed as a Territorial Army Regiment in 1901. The Regiment enjoyed very close links with the City throughout its existence. In 1903, for example, Westminster City Council agreed that the Coat of Arms of the Council could be adopted as the Regiment’s cap badge. The ‘Regimental Church’ was Westminster Abbey, there is a stained glass window dedicated to the Regiment in the Abbey, and the Regiment’s past guidons hang in St Georges Chapel.
- 4 In recognition of these close ties, the Westminster Dragoons was granted the Freedom of the City of Westminster on 15th March 1951.
- 4.1 In 1967, the Westminster Dragoons Regiments was merged with other Territorial Army Regiments and became one of six squadrons of the newly formed Royal Yeomanry Regiment. However, the Westminster Dragoons Squadron retained close links with Westminster City. Only last year, Westminster Abbey hosted a service for the Westminster Dragoons, conducted by the Dean and attended by the Lord Mayor, who inspected the troops.

Current Situation

- 3.5 A question has been raised about whether the Westminster Dragoons SQUADRON still enjoys the Freedom of the City of Westminster, given that the Freedom was vested in the Westminster Dragoons REGIMENT. The legalities are unclear. A simple expedient would be for the Royal Yeomanry Regiment – the parent unit to which the Westminster Dragoons Squadron now belongs - to be granted the Freedom of the City of Westminster.
- 3.6 The Royal Yeomanry Regiment is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year (2017). This would be an appropriate occasion for the City to pass a decision to grant the Freedom. The actual ceremony need not take place until 2018.

4. Legal Implications

- 4.1 Whilst Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972 gives the Council power to confer the freedom of the City on an individual it does not allow freedom honours to be conferred on bodies in the same way.
- 4.2 It is, however, considered appropriate to confer freedom rights on bodies as the Council sees fit. In doing so, the Council should follow the same decision making process as if it was conferring these rights on an individual.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 It is customary for Westminster City Council to bear the costs of the ceremony and reception. However, the regiment is being asked for a financial contribution and sponsorship will also be sought to cover the estimated maximum cost of £15,000 of the illuminated document, the presentation ceremony and a reception to mark the occasion. If sufficient sponsorship is not forthcoming a report be submitted to the Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Corporate Services.

6. **Other Implications:** None

**If you have any questions about this report, or wish to inspect one of the background papers, please contact Mick Steward:
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