

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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| COMMITTEE | City Growth and Resources |
| DATE | 25 th August 2021 |
| EXEMPT | No |
| CONFIDENTIAL | No |
| REPORT TITLE | Commemorative and Court Plaques Policy |
| REPORT NUMBER | COM/21/173 |
| DIRECTOR | Gale Beattie |
| CHIEF OFFICER | Richard Sweetnam |
| REPORT AUTHOR | Katy Kavanagh |
| TERMS OF REFERENCE | 2.1.5 |

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report is seeking Committee approval for a revision of the Council's Plaques Policy, which guides the decisions of Council officers and Committees on whether a person, event or building should be recognised with a plaque by the City Council, and was last revised in 2002.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 Agree to the implementation of the Plaques Policy with effect from the date of the Committee meeting (25 August 2021); and
- 2.2 Agree to the proposed colour change for the People Plaques to blue and white.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 From the 19th century, plaques have been erected in Aberdeen commemorating people and places which have shaped the city, Scotland or beyond – people who have made outstanding achievements in their field, or buildings or events of historic significance. The City Council have overseen the erection of these plaques since 1978.
- 3.2 In 2002 guidelines for the erection of commemorative plaques were adopted by the Education and Leisure Committee. This did not cover the “Court” plaques that mark significant buildings and events around the city.
- 3.3 Officers received 16 nominations between 2015 and 2020, 4 of which were rejected and 12 approved. The process from nomination to installation is complex and relies on the nominator undertaking considerable work: identifying an appropriate site for the plaque; demonstrating the nominee's historic significance; receiving planning permission and building owner permission, before an approved plaque can be installed. This can take many months to achieve and create frustration for unsuccessful applications. There is also a

significant amount of officer's time invested in the process, undertaking research to confirm the nominee's significance, and working with nominators to identify a suitable location.

- 3.4 In order to provide a more comprehensive guide for Council officers and those nominating subjects for a plaque, a new policy has been developed (see appendix 1). This incorporates the criteria nominations for People or Place Plaques must meet. It also outlines the responsibilities of nominators and the Council in respect to the installation of plaques. Where required, nominators will have to obtain the necessary planning consents in addition to this application process.
- 3.5 The Policy gives a clearer definition of how a person, event or building's significance will be assessed. Establishing these criteria will ensure decisions can be reached in fair, consistent manner and reduce the risk of customers being disappointed by an unsuccessful application.
- 3.6 The policy specifies that to be recognised with a plaque a person must have lived or worked in Aberdeen for at least five years; or been born in Aberdeen; or made their discovery or accomplishment in Aberdeen. This is to ensure only those with a significant connection to Aberdeen are recognised.
- 3.7 It also establishes time limits for nominating individuals and events: the previous guidance just specified that individuals must be deceased, this policy proposes adopting a 20 years after death/100 years after birth rule for people (in line with Historic Environment Scotland's guidance) and a 50 year rule for events. This is to ensure decisions are made with a sufficient degree of hindsight and reduce the risk of reputational damage to the Council.
- 3.8 Officers will review nominations against the criteria set out in the Policy and make a recommendation to the City Growth and Resources Committee for approval. Applications that do not meet the Council's criteria will be refused by the Chief Officer- City Growth after consultation with the Committee's Convener.
- 3.9 The policy also sets out a process for officers to follow where there has been a significant reappraisal of an individual's contribution after a plaque has been erected. This measure will again reduce the risk of reputational damage to the Council.
- 3.10 An appendix sets out the technical specifications for siting plaques and the style for text. The policy will be accompanied by application forms and additional guidance (see drafts in appendix 2 and 3), made available on the Council's website, and a communication strategy will be adopted to ensure the citizens of Aberdeen are aware of the changes.
- 3.11 A draft version of the policy was sent out for consultation to the Aberdeen Women's Alliance, the Head of Special Collections and Museums at the University of Aberdeen and the Aberdeen City Heritage Trust as organisations that have submitted plaque proposals or who have an interest in the historic environment of the city. We also consulted the Council's Equalities Team and

officers in Strategic Place Planning. After consultation we are also proposing that from this point forward the People Plaques colour scheme is changed to blue and white to make them more readable for those with visual impairments. The Place Plaques would retain their existing black/gold colouring.

- 3.12 Consultees raised concerns that the costs of the process could be a potential barrier to individuals and groups nominating an individual, event or building for recognition with a plaque. Therefore the guidance in appendix 2 includes suggestions of possible sources of funding.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 All applicants to the Commemorative Plaque scheme must agree to meet the manufacture and erection costs for proposed plaques, therefore there are no direct costs involved for the Council.
- 4.2 There has always been a staff resource cost associated with the Plaques Scheme in terms of vetting applications and preparing reports. It is anticipated that adoption of this policy will result in savings, by reducing staff time resource costs through time spent on unsuitable nominations.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

6. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

| Category | Risk | Low (L) Medium (M) High (H) | Mitigation |
|------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|--|
| Strategic Risk | Inconsistent decision making on Council's Plaques Scheme | Low (L) | Adopting the criteria set out in the policy should reduce this risk, as will oversight of Committee |
| Compliance | None identified | | |
| Operational | None identified | | |
| Financial | Staff time if excessive applications received | Low (L) | Criteria set out in policy should reduce the number of unsuitable applications received. |
| Reputational | Plaque to unsuitable person, event or building erected or application for worthy subject declined. | Low (L) | Research carried out by staff as part of the vetting process should mitigate this risk. Any concerns should be raised for Committee to reach a decision. |
| Environment / Climate | None identified | | |

7. OUTCOMES

| <u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</u> | |
|---|---|
| Impact of Report | |
| Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement | The proposals within this report will ensure that the Council's Plaques scheme can contribute to increasing footfall within the city as part of the City Centre Masterplan (Economy - Policy Statement 4). |
| Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan | |
| Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes | Plaques contribute to the city centre as a visitor destination linked to heritage tourism, specifically supporting the following areas of the Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-26 (pages 13 and 14): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We will seek to develop a City of Learning approach that empowers people and communities to put lifelong learning at the heart of their civic and cultural identities.” Key Driver 1.1 “Diversification of the economy into other growth sectors including wider energy related sectors; tourism; food and drink; life sciences; health and social care and construction.”, contributing to Stretch Outcome 1: 10% increase in employment across priority and volume growth sectors by 2026. |
| Regional and City Strategies | Plaques can contribute to the Regional Economic Strategy 2018-2023 Action Plan's internationalization theme point vii): Delivery and marketing of cultural, heritage and tourism attractions. They can also play a role in the tours and maximise opportunities for the local market of the Socio-Economic Recovery plan (actions 3.4 and 3.1 of the Place Theme). |

8. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

| Assessment | Outcome |
|--|---|
| Impact Assessment | Integrated Impact Assessment completed. |
| Data Protection Impact Assessment | Not required |

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Historic Environment Scotland's Commemorative Plaque Scheme guidance
<https://www.historicenvironment.scot/about-us/what-we-do/commemorative-plaque-scheme>

10. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Plaques Policy

Appendix 2 – Draft Public Guidance

Appendix 3 – Draft Application Forms

11. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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